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**Evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for  
Western Asia****Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services***Summary*

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) fosters comprehensive, equitable, integrated and sustainable development through effective economic and social cooperation in the region.

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) examined the relevance and effectiveness of ESCWA, focusing on how its three core functions — consensus-building, research and analysis and advisory services — support member States in the discussion, formulation and implementation of policy. The evaluation was conducted using surveys, interviews, on-site visits, direct observation, case studies, document reviews and secondary data analysis.

ESCWA has operated in an environment characterized by protracted conflict and political instability that has affected social dynamics in the region and posed several challenges to its work. Against that backdrop, the Commission has provided an important platform for building regional consensus and facilitating decision-making on global agenda items and thematic areas by providing an evidence-based, strategic and neutral platform for dialogue. While ESCWA has addressed the main priorities of its member States through its subsidiary body structure, it lacks a more systematic and regular approach to fully address newly emerging issues in the region.



The Commission's knowledge generation, through its research and analysis work, has not been fully utilized to increase awareness of development in the region, owing primarily to deficient dissemination practices and feedback mechanisms. While discussions are ongoing to improve its publications programme, concrete strategies have yet to be implemented.

ESCWA advisory services have generally been well received, but their influence on policy has not been widespread. In addition, they have not been adequately linked with the Commission's other two core functions, research and analysis and consensus-building, to support policy formulation.

As member States focus on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, ESCWA has played a key role in facilitating a regional position on the Sustainable Development Goals and on developing a strategy for moving forward in support of their implementation.

OIOS makes five important recommendations:

- Strengthen capacity to address newly emerging issues
- Develop and implement a comprehensive publications strategy
- Strengthen methodologies for collecting, analysing and reporting on programme performance
- Develop a detailed strategy and action plan for strengthening linkages between the Commission's three core functions
- Propose options for increasing the support provided to member States for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

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## I. Introduction and objective

1. The Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) identified the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) for evaluation on the basis of a risk assessment undertaken by OIOS to identify the programme evaluation priorities of the Secretariat. The Committee for Programme and Coordination selected the programme evaluation of ESCWA for consideration at its fifty-seventh session, to be held in June 2017.<sup>1</sup> The General Assembly endorsed that selection in its resolution 70/8.

2. The general frame of reference for OIOS is set out in General Assembly resolutions 48/218 B, 54/244 and 59/272, as well as in the Secretary-General's bulletin on the establishment of the Office (ST/SGB/273), which authorizes OIOS to initiate, carry out and report on any action that it considers necessary to fulfil its responsibilities. OIOS evaluation is provided for in the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation.<sup>2</sup>

3. The objective of the evaluation was to determine as systematically and objectively as possible the relevance and effectiveness of ESCWA. The evaluation topic emerged from a programme-level risk assessment, covers all substantive areas of the programme and is described in the evaluation inception paper.<sup>3</sup> The evaluation has been conducted in conformity with the norms and standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group.

4. The comments of ESCWA management on the draft report were sought and taken into account in the preparation of the final report. The formal ESCWA response is included in the annex.

## II. Background

### Mandate

5. ESCWA<sup>4</sup> was created by Economic and Social Council resolution 1818 (LV) and resolution 1985/69, by which the Council amended the Commission's terms of reference to emphasize its social functions. Furthermore, the Council, in its resolution 2005/50, requested ESCWA to provide support to member countries in realizing the Millennium Development Goals.

6. The Commission's mandate is to foster comprehensive, equitable, integrated and sustainable development through effective economic and social cooperation in the region. It assists member States in addressing policy weaknesses and enhancing capacities to address inequalities, and uses its convening power to provide a forum

<sup>1</sup> See A/70/16.

<sup>2</sup> See ST/SGB/2016.6, regulation 7.1.

<sup>3</sup> IED-15-003.

<sup>4</sup> In its resolution 321 (XXVIII), the Commission recommended that the Economic and Social Council redesignate the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia as the "Economic and Social Commission for Arab States", but that recommendation has yet to be endorsed by the General Assembly.

for member States to discuss and share views on regional economic, social and sustainable development issues. ESCWA pursues the following specific objectives:

- (a) To support economic and social development in member States;
- (b) To promote interaction and cooperation between member States;
- (c) To encourage the exchange of experiences, best practices and lessons learned;
- (d) To achieve regional integration and ensure interaction between Western Asia and other regions;
- (e) To raise global awareness of the circumstances and needs of member States.

#### **Governance**

7. ESCWA is composed of 18 members,<sup>5</sup> with, most recently, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia becoming full members in 2012 and Mauritania in 2015. The Commission, through its ministerial session, meets once every two years, in even years.

8. Member States exercise corporate governance through their participation in the Commission. ESCWA management brings key issues to the attention of member States to facilitate the decision-making process, implement decisions and provide secretariat services to the Commission and its nine subsidiary bodies:

- (a) Executive Committee (formerly Technical Committee);
- (b) Statistical Committee;
- (c) Committee on Social Development;
- (d) Committee on Energy;
- (e) Committee on Water Resources;
- (f) Committee on Transport;
- (g) Technical Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade, Economic Globalization and Financing for Development in the Countries of the ESCWA Region;
- (h) Committee on Women;
- (i) Committee on Technology for Development.

#### **Management, organizational structure and resources**

9. ESCWA is led by an Executive Secretary at the Under-Secretary-General level and is assisted by two Deputy Executive Secretaries, one for Programme and one for Programme Support.

<sup>5</sup> Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen and the State of Palestine.

10. Table 1 shows that the Commission's total regular budget for the biennium 2014-2015 was \$73.986 million. The Commission's extrabudgetary resources more than tripled from the biennium 2010-2011 to the biennium 2014-2015. ESCWA has 260 staff, including 119 in the Professional category. Its budget is broken down as follows:

- (a) Policymaking organs, with \$156,000, representing less than 1 per cent;
- (b) Executive direction and management, with \$4.376 million, representing 6 per cent;
- (c) Programme of work, with \$35 461 million, representing 51 per cent;
- (d) Programme support, with \$29.737 million, representing 43 per cent.

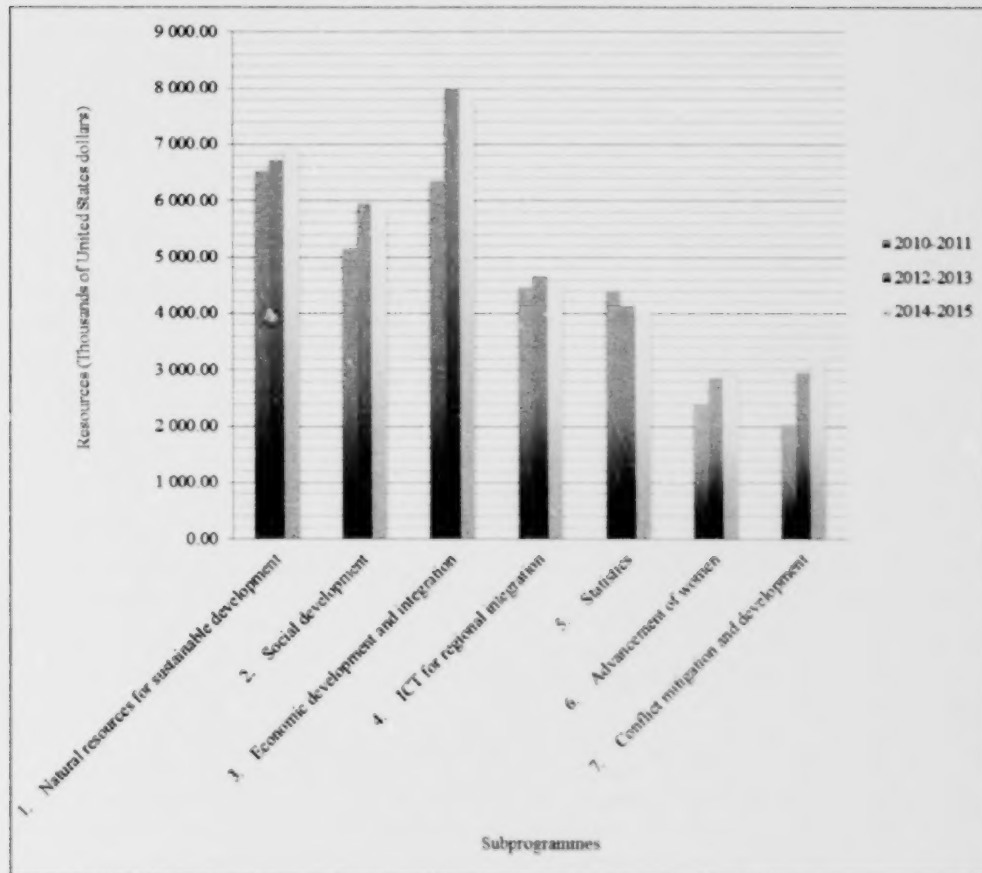
Table 1  
Regular budget and extrabudgetary resources of the Commission, 2014-2015

|                | Resources (thousands of United States dollars) |                 |                 | No. of posts |            |            |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|------------|------------|
|                | 2010-2011                                      | 2012-2013       | 2014-2015       | 2010-2011    | 2012-2013  | 2014-2015  |
| Regular budget | 64 409.2                                       | 69 177.9        | 73 986.9        | 261          | 264        | 260        |
| Extrabudgetary | 3 580.4                                        | 11 160.1        | 12 120.4        | —            | —          | —          |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>67 989.6</b>                                | <b>80 338.0</b> | <b>86 107.3</b> | <b>261</b>   | <b>264</b> | <b>260</b> |

Source: A/68/6 (Sect. 22) and ESCWA final appropriations report.

11. The Commission's programme of work is implemented by seven interdependent and complementary subprogrammes, which are shown in figure 1 together with their resource distribution during the period 2010-2015.

Figure I  
Subprogramme and budget distribution of the Commission, 2010-2015



Source: A/68/6 (Sect. 22) and A/66/6 (Sect. 22).

Abbreviation: ICT, information and communications technology.

### Core functions

12. The Commission's mandate is delivered through three interrelated core functions: (a) serving as a regional forum and consensus builder on regional and thematic development issues; (b) providing analysis, research and evidence-based policy alternatives; and (c) providing advisory services to facilitate the formulation, adoption and implementation of development policies. Figure II depicts how the three core functions are linked to influence regional policy.

Figure II  
Functional linkages in support of the Commission's policy influence



#### Operational environment

13. ESCWA operates in an environment characterized by protracted conflict and political instability. Conflict situations currently exist in nearly half of the countries in the region, making it one of the most conflict-ridden in the world. By 2015, 37.5 per cent of the population in the region lived in a country affected by conflict or instability.<sup>6</sup> The political landscape of the region has experienced dramatic transformation in recent years. Since 2011, political uprisings in countries such as Egypt, Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Yemen and other Arab countries have illustrated the demand for good governance and better economic and social conditions.<sup>7</sup>

14. Deteriorating security conditions have negatively affected the economies of the region. These include the developed economies of most Gulf Cooperation Council countries<sup>8</sup> and the economies of the countries of the Arab Mashreq<sup>9</sup> and the Arab Maghreb,<sup>10</sup> which include middle-income and least developed countries, as well as the economies of Arab least developed countries.<sup>11</sup> It is estimated that the average growth rate of the gross domestic product of the Arab region in real terms in 2014 was 1.5 per cent, a negligible change compared with 2013. The economies of Gulf Cooperation Council countries grew by approximately 4 per cent in 2014 and an estimated 3.4 per cent in 2015. However, the economies of the Arab Mashreq countries contracted by an average of about 0.6 per cent in 2014 and are estimated to have grown by only 1.2 per cent in 2015, while the economies of the Arab Maghreb countries, which contracted by 3.9 per cent in 2014, are estimated to have grown by only 1.2 per cent in 2015. According to available data for the fourth quarter of 2014, the unemployment rates for the State of Palestine stood at 26.5 per cent; for Egypt, at 12.9 per cent; for Jordan, at 12.3 per cent; for Saudi Arabia, at 11.6 per cent among Saudi nationals; and for Morocco, at 9.7 per cent.<sup>12</sup> A significant fall in oil prices has become an additional economic concern.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See E/ESCWA/2015/EC.2/4 (Part VII).

<sup>7</sup> See E/ESCWA/ECRI/2014/W.G.2/Report.

<sup>8</sup> Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

<sup>9</sup> Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and the State of Palestine.

<sup>10</sup> Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia.

<sup>11</sup> Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen.

<sup>12</sup> See E/ESCWA/EDID/2015/2/Summary.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

15. Intensifying armed conflict in the region has affected social dynamics, including through mass displacement. In 2014, there were 10.6 million refugees and 15.2 million internally displaced persons in the region. Those numbers have significantly increased in Iraq, Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen and the State of Palestine in recent years, causing humanitarian crises. Moreover, the scale of displacement has eroded human capital and hampered social development in the region. For example, social impacts are being increasingly felt in Jordan and Lebanon, where demographic structures have changed as a result of the influx of refugees and strained basic services.

### III. Methodology

16. The evaluation examined how ESCWA has carried out its three core functions to support member States in the discussion, formulation and implementation of policy, and whether it is fit for purpose to support their implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. It did not cover the Commission's programme of work relating to conference management services and administration.

17. The time frame for the evaluation was primarily the period 2012-2015. Selective data and information from earlier years were also reviewed to support the analysis of particular thematic issues.

18. The evaluation employed the following combination of methods for the collection of qualitative and quantitative data (all evaluation results are based on a triangulation of multiple data sources):

(a) **Interviews:** a total of 81 semi-structured interviews with ESCWA staff, member States and key stakeholders;

(b) **Missions:** to ESCWA headquarters in Beirut and to Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and the State of Palestine. The missions included direct observation of two back-to-back intergovernmental processes;

(c) **Surveys:** web-based surveys of a non-random sample of ESCWA staff<sup>14</sup> and all ESCWA member States;<sup>15</sup>

(d) **Review of documents:** structured content analysis of key reports and documentation, including ESCWA strategic plans and financial documents; programme performance reports; minutes of meetings of senior management; reports and resolutions of the intergovernmental bodies; technical materials and publications; and press releases;

(e) **Secondary data analysis:** analysis of data from the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System (IMDIS); social media such as Facebook and Twitter; and audit and evaluation reports;

<sup>14</sup> The staff survey was sent to a non-random sample of 193 staff, comprising all senior and Professional staff members and research assistants with substantive responsibilities. In total, 107 staff responded, for a 55 per cent response rate.

<sup>15</sup> The member State survey was sent to all 18 member States and was targeted at individuals at the ministerial level who had participated in the 2014 ministerial session. In total, five responded, for a 27.7 per cent response rate.

(f) **Analysis of intergovernmental decisions;**<sup>16</sup>

(g) **Case studies:** in-depth analysis of four thematic areas (social development, gender mainstreaming, national development planning and Sustainable Development Goals).<sup>17</sup>

19. The evaluation encountered a limitation in terms of the low rate of response to the member State survey, to which 5 of 18 member States responded.

#### IV. Evaluation results

##### A. **The Commission has provided an important platform for building consensus and facilitating decision-making on global agenda items and thematic areas in a volatile region**

###### **The complex regional context has posed several challenges to the Commission's work**

20. As highlighted in paragraphs 13 to 15 above, ESCWA has operated against a backdrop of protracted armed conflict and violence, increasing disruption of intraregional cooperation and a transition in some member States towards good governance. This complex regional context has had an impact on its work. The most frequently cited challenge to the Commission's overall effectiveness, cited both by staff surveyed (40 per cent) and by external stakeholders interviewed (22 per cent), was the conflict and political instability in the region. Conflict was seen as having a significant impact on the consensus-building work of ESCWA, since current security conditions in the region have limited the participation of member States in intergovernmental meetings, in particular those held at security-restricted duty stations such as Beirut. Conflict not only causes structural barriers to consensus-building in a regional setting, but also affects the ability of Governments to address policy issues on which ESCWA focuses. Restricted interactions with and responses from relevant counterparts in several countries, such as the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, have affected the type and the extent of the technical assistance and follow-up that ESCWA has been able to provide. The volatile situations in some countries have made it challenging to address development issues, since political and governance issues have been of higher priority.

###### **The Commission's main comparative advantage has been its provision of a neutral, strategic and evidence-based platform for dialogue and consensus-building**

21. ESCWA has played an important role in promoting dialogue and consensus in the region. Most external stakeholders interviewed (73 per cent) reported that the

<sup>16</sup> Decisions were assessed from the twenty-sixth, twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth sessions of the Commission and the three most recent sessions of the Committees on Energy, Water Resources, Liberalization of Foreign Trade, Transport, Statistics, Social Development and Women and the Executive Committee.

<sup>17</sup> Case studies were selected on the following criteria: subprogramme coverage; the relevance of the thematic area to the Commission's mandate; the extent of the advisory services provided; and the potential number of policy instruments influenced. Case study analyses were integrated into the evaluation results as an additional source of evidence.

Commission added value through its role as a regional platform for the exchange of ideas, bringing stakeholders together and building consensus on important development issues. Similarly, most staff surveyed (73 per cent) indicated that ESCWA was either very effective or effective in providing a forum for regional dialogue and the deliberation of key development policy issues in the Arab region. The Commission has played that role through the provision of evidence-based analysis at various intergovernmental deliberations and expert group meetings focused on gender, social development, statistics, water, energy, trade and transport issues. A recent example of the Commission's consensus-building role was the adoption by member States in 2014 of the Tunis Declaration on Social Justice in the Arab Region, which lays out a vision of social justice in the region and establishes commitments aimed at ensuring that progress is made in the achievement of sustainable development.

22. ESCWA has been able to play an important broker role in the region. Most government officials (20 of 22) and regional partners from the League of Arab States (6 of 6) interviewed noted that the Commission's neutral broker role had enabled it to promote dialogue and facilitate discussion both by incorporating a range of different perspectives into its analyses and by providing technical support for that discussion; they also noted that ESCWA was effective in facilitating regional and thematic forums in support of regional decision-making. In a survey conducted by ESCWA in 2015, most member States surveyed (85 per cent) gave it positive ratings for its technical servicing and contributions to the facilitation of intergovernmental meetings, both for the Commission's ministerial sessions and for its technical subsidiary committees.

23. ESCWA has contributed to the building of consensus and facilitated decision-making at three levels — global, regional and thematic — each of which is discussed in greater detail below.

#### **The Commission has facilitated regional consensus on global agenda items**

24. ESCWA has successfully facilitated the formulation of regional positions on a number of global development items, as demonstrated through the positive outcomes identified in table 2. In addition to promoting dialogue, it has achieved this by bringing specific issues to the discussion table and providing technical analyses, reports and presentations to inform the discussions in question. In addition to the Tunis Declaration on Social Justice for the Arab Region, referred to in paragraph 21 above, which was a significant achievement because it addressed social justice from a multisectoral perspective and illustrated the Commission's strategy of providing a vision of integrated development, ESCWA facilitated the adoption of other regional positions and agreements on global agenda items over the past four years. This enabled its member States to better articulate a common voice in global policymaking processes.

Table 2

**Key regional positions and agreements on global agenda items facilitated by the Commission, 2012-2015**

Facilitated the adoption of the Arab Ministerial Declaration on the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, which contributed to the discussions at the Conference (2012)

Facilitated a regional position on the Sustainable Development Goals and the post-2015 development agenda (2015)

Facilitated a regional position on the follow-up to the Beijing Declaration (2012)

Facilitated an Arab common position for the third International Conference on Financing for Development (2015)

Facilitated the adoption of the Cairo Declaration on the Post-2015 Development Agenda for Women (2015)

Supported the League of Arab States in crafting priority development goals that led efforts towards the adoption of the Arab Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development (2014)

Supported the Arab Ministerial Water Council in the preparation of its action plan to implement the Arab Strategy for Water Security in the Arab Region to Meet the Challenges and Future Needs for Sustainable Development 2010-2030 (2014)

Supported the development of the regional implementation strategy of the 2008 System of National Accounts (2012-2013)

Facilitated the declaration of the Council of Arab Ministers for Social Affairs on the post-2015 inclusive and sustainable development priorities of the Arab region (2014)

**The Commission has also contributed to the adoption of key regional resolutions**

25. Over the past three bienniums, ESCWA has supported member States in reaching regional consensus across nine sectoral areas, shown in table 3. Through their facilitation of the ministerial sessions held every two years, member States have adopted 20 resolutions to advance the economic, social and environmental development in the region.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> There are no quantitative targets for number of resolutions against which to compare this number.

Table 3  
Regional resolutions adopted at ministerial sessions facilitated by the  
Commission, 2010-2014

| Ministerial session by sector | Number of resolutions          |                                  |                                 |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
|                               | Twenty-sixth session<br>(2010) | Twenty-seventh session<br>(2012) | Twenty-eighth session<br>(2014) |
| Social development            | 1                              | 2                                |                                 |
| Economic development          | 1                              | 1                                |                                 |
| Technology for development    | 1                              | 1                                | 1                               |
| Statistics                    | 1                              |                                  |                                 |
| Women                         | 1                              |                                  |                                 |
| Emerging conflict and related | 1                              | 1                                | 1                               |
| Administrative and planning   | 4                              | 5                                | 5                               |
| Political                     |                                | 1                                |                                 |
| Sustainable development       |                                | 1                                | 1                               |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>10</b>                      | <b>12</b>                        | <b>8</b>                        |

Source: E/2010/41, E/ESCWA/26/9 Report, E/2012/41, E/ESCWA/27/9 Report, E/2014/41 and E/ESCWA/28/9 Report.

26. In connection with the 20 resolutions referred to above, ESCWA has facilitated the adoption of 33 Commission decisions per year on average since 2010. Those decisions have been of four types: requests to ESCWA, agreements, recommendations and calls for member State action. Examples of requests to the Commission have included requests to follow up on successful public sector development initiatives in support of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and to prepare a report and assist member States in addressing the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. Examples of agreements have included the adoption of the statute of the ESCWA Technology Centre and the adoption of the ESCWA draft strategic framework. Examples of recommendations have included the recommendation that the Economic and Social Council redesignate ESCWA as the "Economic and Social Commission for Arab States". Examples of calls for member State action have included asking member States to participate in the sessions of the Arab High-level Forum on Sustainable Development and calling upon all member States to enhance coordination between national statistical offices to implement national strategies for statistical development.

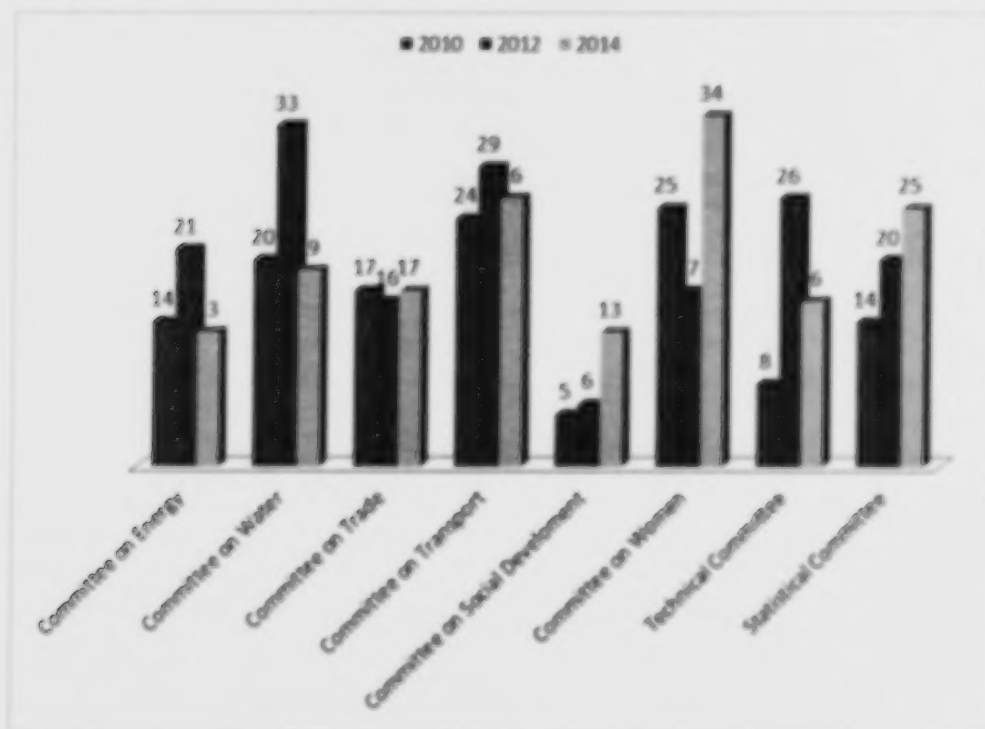
**The Commission has also generated dialogue and facilitated decision-making across various thematic areas**

27. As part of its overall consensus-building effort, ESCWA has promoted thematic debate through its subsidiary body structure. Whether in terms of statistics, gender, social development, foreign trade, transport, water or energy, ESCWA has played a catalytic role by bringing government officials together to exchange experiences and discuss relevant technical issues, challenges and policy options. Most member States interviewed (16 of 22) and all six partners from the League of Arab States

confirmed that they valued the Commission's thematic consensus-building work. Direct observation of recent meetings of the Committees on Liberalization of Foreign Trade and on Transport illustrated the Commission's effective facilitation of thematic decision-making through its presentation of supporting analyses and technical papers that guided debate and informed member State decisions. For example, government officials from two member States interviewed noted that improvements in road safety in the region had been due in part to the road safety measures discussed and adopted by the Committee on Transport.

28. Through its subsidiary structure of thematic committees, ESCWA has facilitated consensus in eight specific thematic clusters over the past three bienniums, as shown in figure III. With respect to the three sectoral areas for which specific performance measures have been established — water resources, energy and women — the number of decisions taken has exceeded the target. In total, ESCWA subsidiary bodies have taken some 458 decisions during this time period.

Figure III  
Thematic decisions by subsidiary bodies facilitated by the Commission,  
2010-2014



Source: Reports of ESCWA subsidiary bodies.

**B. The Commission has addressed the main priorities of its member States, but lacks a systematic approach to fully address newly emerging issues in the region**

**The Commission's overall work programme responds to priorities as approved within its intergovernmental structure**

29. Through the thematic subsidiary bodies highlighted above, technical counterparts in government ministries, in consultation with ESCWA, have consistently decided upon the Commission's proposed programme of work and a set of priorities for each thematic area. A review of the most recent deliberations of the subsidiary bodies shows that government officials have highlighted certain thematic areas and priorities within the Commission's mandate.

30. On average, 11 member States have participated in the discussions of the seven thematic committees over the past five years, which indicates fairly active participation by member States in the establishment of the Commission's priorities. A survey on the subsidiary committee deliberations conducted by ESCWA after each Committee session from 2012 to 2015 showed that 75 per cent of the government officials participating in the Committee meetings were largely satisfied with the discussions and relevance of the topics presented to them by ESCWA. The sessions included discussions on trade and transport; water management and energy issues; social development; gender; and statistics. The Commission subsequently endorsed all of the thematic priorities recommended in the Committees. Table 4 shows that member States have approved programmes of work for all subprogrammes through their subsidiary bodies over the past three bienniums, and indicates participation in the process by a good number of member States.

Table 4

**Member State participation in the approval of thematic work programmes across the subsidiary bodies of the Commission, 2010-2014**

| Subsidiary body                 | No. of member States |           |           | Thematic areas covered                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|-----------|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                 | 2010-2011            | 2012-2013 | 2014-2015 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Statistical Committee           | 12                   | 10        | 10        | Multidimensional measurement of poverty; measurement of social justice; economic, social and environmental statistics; national accounts; Sustainable Development Goals; international comparison parity prices                                                            |
| Committee on Social Development | 11                   | 10        | 13        | Social justice and equity; civil society and citizen participation; demographic shifting; youth; migration; ageing; employment and labour market; social cohesion; inclusive development; poverty; disability                                                              |
| Committee on Energy             | 14                   | 11        | 12        | Sustainable energy; natural resources management; energy efficiency; renewable energy; energy-food-water nexus                                                                                                                                                             |
| Committee on Water Resources    | 11                   | 13        | 13        | Integrated management of water resources; Regional Initiative for the Assessment of the Impact of Climate Change on Water Resources and Socioeconomic Vulnerability in the Arab Region; sustainable development; water management; water and sustainability; food security |

| <i>Subsidiary body</i>                       | <i>No. of member States</i> |                  |                  | <i>Thematic areas covered</i>                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                              | <i>2010-2011</i>            | <i>2012-2013</i> | <i>2014-2015</i> |                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Committee on Transport                       | 12                          | 12               | 11               | Transport and trade facilitation; international railways; transport logistics and efficient trade costs; infrastructure efficiency; road safety and integrated transport systems; sustainable transport |
| Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade | 11                          | 17               | 14               | Private and public partnerships; trade policies; foreign trade; trade negotiations; economic globalization; financing for development                                                                   |
| Committee on Women                           | 12                          | 13               | 14               | Gender mainstreaming; gender violence; women's rights                                                                                                                                                   |

*Source:* the past three sessions of each of the thematic subsidiary bodies.

**In contrast to the Commission's regular approved work programme, emerging strategic issues have been addressed less systematically**

31. ESCWA has received a number of requests to address emerging issues that were not initially planned in its programme of work. Owing to their unanticipated nature, ESCWA has identified them in an ad hoc manner. There have been programmatic and financial challenges to this approach, such as exploring further opportunities for replicability, identifying the resources required to deliver the support requested, and fitting the additional activities into an already approved work programme. Despite those challenges, ESCWA has been able to address some significant recent developments in the region through this demand-driven approach. For example, the Commission:

- Supported analysis for and the holding of high-level meetings to promote dialogue and discussion on issues stemming from the Arab Spring<sup>19</sup>
- Facilitated analysis of the implications of conflict for the macroeconomy and the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals in the Syrian Arab Republic and the preparation of a needs assessment report and facilitation of discussion on the National Agenda for the Future of Syria
- Initiated work to facilitate discussions in Yemen with regard to its current conflict and to identify reforms needed to move towards recovery and a sustainable development agenda for the future
- Supported requests for assistance in national development planning and the monitoring of indicators in Saudi Arabia
- Assisted Lebanon in the development of a preliminary vision and strengthening of national development planning capacities and initiated similar support for Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates on this topic.

32. In responding to newly emerging strategic issues and requests such as those discussed above, ESCWA has been hampered by the lack of a more strategic and systematic approach to discussing and following up on such demands for its support. Despite the critical importance of some of the new issues that ESCWA faces, such as national development planning, and although meetings of the

<sup>19</sup> E/ESCWA/EDGD/2013/WG.1/Report.

Executive Committee include discussions on regional and global priorities, the Commission has lacked a more dedicated approach to regular consultation and dialogue with member States on those issues, especially those that have regional relevance. Most of the Commission's senior leadership (at the D-1 level and above) interviewed noted that one of their major challenges was their limited flexibility in responding to new demands and requests of member States, especially in the context of a dynamic and rapidly changing regional environment. They noted that the ESCWA programme of work must be proposed and discussed almost four years in advance, leaving little room for responding to newly emerging priorities and requirements and no opportunity for continuous discussion and consultation with member States to decide on strategic options that might require more immediate attention and follow-up. In the absence of a more strategic and systematic approach to discussing and responding to unforeseen demands, ESCWA has not been able to maximize the value that it can provide to the region and leverage its unique regional mandate.

33. Member States have acknowledged this need, particularly in crisis situations. It was recognized by the Commission through the upgrading of an Emerging and Conflict-related Issues Division as well as through the establishment of a subsidiary committee on emerging issues and development in conflict settings by its resolutions 292 (XXVI) and 296 (XXVI). However, since the adoption of those resolutions, member States have decided that the work carried out by the Division on emerging and conflict-related issues is sufficient and therefore have eliminated the need for this specialized intergovernmental committee. Nevertheless, not all emerging issues are related to conflict, and most are addressed in an interdisciplinary manner through cross-cutting task forces whose work is funded mostly from other budgetary sources such as the regular programme of technical cooperation and the Development Account. In that regard, the establishment of the Division has not fully addressed the need to establish a more regular approach to consultation with member States on newly emerging issues of potential relevance to the entire region.

### **C. The Commission's research and analysis have not been fully utilized to increase knowledge about critical development issues**

**Knowledge generation and promotion, a key component of the Commission's mandate, has been hindered by deficient dissemination practices and feedback mechanisms**

34. One of the Commission's main objectives is to provide "a home for expertise and knowledge" on social and economic development issues facing the region. Accordingly, significant amounts of human and financial resources are dedicated to its research and analysis activities that generate knowledge, primarily through its publications programme. During the biennium 2014-2015, more than 72 per cent of the Commission's outputs were recurrent and non-recurrent publications, technical materials and related expert group meetings.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, nearly 75 per cent of its total staff work-months were dedicated to producing knowledge.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The remaining 28 per cent were dedicated to capacity-building and advisory services.

<sup>21</sup> The remaining 25 per cent were related to advisory services and capacity-building.

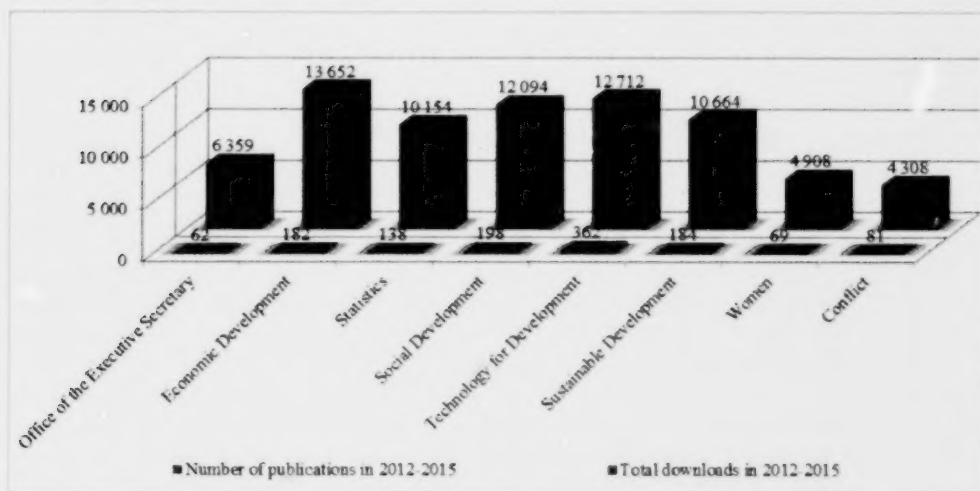
35. Dissemination practices with respect to ESCWA publications have not been as effective as they could be owing to the lack of a planning and outreach strategy for targeting readers. An analysis of ESCWA publication concept notes<sup>22</sup> produced during the biennium 2013-2014 showed that explicit dissemination goals were not required and did not exist for most ESCWA knowledge products. The distribution of these products has not been strategic, and data on actual report distribution are inconsistent; rather, dissemination lists have been managed by each individual division and have varied in size and content. Therefore, the total targeted number and type of readers intended for each product is unknown across the Commission. On a more ad hoc basis, some publications, such as the *Arab Governance Report* and the *Status of Arab Women Report*, have been presented at expert group meetings for dissemination and awareness-raising. However, this practice is not systematic and there are insufficient data to determine its effectiveness in enhancing the utility of the publications. In prior years, ESCWA developed a readership survey to enable users to provide feedback on publications both electronically and in print, but it is no longer used, and no data were available from previous surveys.

36. Staff and external stakeholders interviewed have mixed views regarding awareness of ESCWA publications. One third of external stakeholders interviewed stated that they were unfamiliar with the Commission's publications. Just over half of staff survey respondents (57 per cent) stated that ESCWA was effective in promoting awareness of important national development issues through its research and analysis work, while 27 per cent were neutral and the remaining 13 per cent rated the Commission as ineffective in that regard.

37. As they are only a proxy measure of use, particularly in a region where Internet access may limit the electronic availability of publications, the download data presented in figure IV provide little clarity regarding the extent to which the knowledge produced by ESCWA is used by its intended beneficiaries. In 2014, the most downloaded publication was its main flagship document, the *Arab Integration Report*, which received 1,433 downloads. Other 2014 flagship reports, such as the *Arab Millennium Development Goals Report*, *An Arab Perspective on the Post-2015 Agenda* and *Summary of the Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region* received only approximately 300 downloads each, which suggests that more can be done to maximize the utility of these key publications. Moreover, in 2012, 51 per cent of all ESCWA knowledge products downloaded received no more than 10 downloads, including 97 that received only 1 download.

<sup>22</sup> Outlines approved by the publications committee.

Figure IV  
Commission publications and downloads by subprogramme, 1 January 2012 to  
31 October 2015



38. As shown in table 5, ESCWA has been less active in leveraging social media outlets, such as Facebook and Twitter, to increase its visibility and promote greater awareness of its work compared with other regional organizations. ESCWA does not have specific strategies, targets or benchmarks for social media outlets, and programme managers rarely use such data to inform publication outreach and dissemination strategies.

Table 5  
Media outlet data as at 7 January 2015

| Organization                                     | Facebook "likes" | Tweets | Twitter followers |
|--------------------------------------------------|------------------|--------|-------------------|
| ESCWA                                            | 5 111            | 1 388  | 700               |
| World Bank — Middle East and North Africa region | 1 044 334        | 7 247  | 7 936             |
| League of Arab States                            | 6 266            | 3 218  | 1 246             |

**Discussions are ongoing to improve the Commission's publications programme, but this reform has not been fully implemented**

39. The ESCWA publications committee is currently reviewing the Commission's overall publications programme and processes in order to reform the publications programme. Part of the reform initiative has involved the development of the following recommendations, none of which has been fully implemented:

- Approve the suggested list of readership indicators
- Undertake the external review of publications

- Implement a communications plan
- Revamp the website as a portal associated with Google Scholar
- E-publish in different formats
- Have a clear strategy for adding publications to social websites
- Add ESCWA bulletins to Arab development journals and citation databases.

40. While these internal efforts are intended to improve the publications programme, and initiatives have also been planned to address issues such as publication quality and internal coordination, the ongoing reform has not fully addressed the lack of a dissemination strategy and of user feedback mechanisms. It is also unclear whether the reform effort will involve consultation with targeted users such as member States, members of academia and civil society and other stakeholders with a view to more comprehensive reform.

**D. While the Commission's advisory services have generally been well received, their influence on policy in the region has not been widespread**

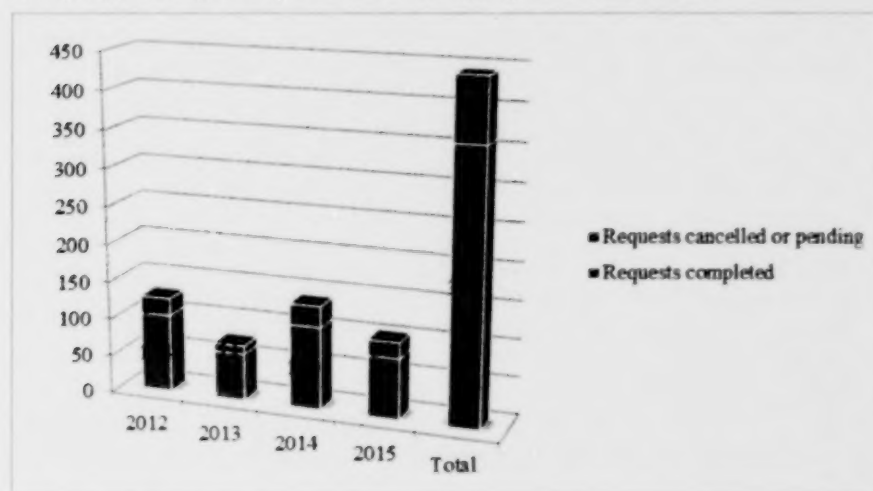
**ESCWA advisory services have been acknowledged as high-quality**

41. The Commission's advisory services accounted for 33 per cent of its expected results and related indicators of achievement during the biennium 2014-2015. Over the past three years, all acknowledgement letters that ESCWA received for its advisory services (20 in total, from six countries and one regional organization) highlighted appreciation for its work, with half specifically mentioning appreciation for advisory support with respect to policy advice. In those letters, member States referred to specific examples of helpful policy advice in such areas as multidimensional poverty indexing, national development planning, gender mainstreaming, social protection, national accounts, information and communications technology strategies and the green economy. All five respondents to a member State survey conducted by ESCWA to assess its advisory services indicated that high-quality service had been delivered.

42. Currently, requests for advisory services with respect to policy support are primarily demand-driven. During the period 2012-2015, a total of 441 requests were made by member States for advisory services, as shown in figure V. Of those 441 requests, more than half (241)<sup>23</sup> were for policy advice and support, with the highest number being in the areas of economic development, technology and innovation and statistics. Seventeen per cent of those were not carried out owing to transfer to another United Nations entity, postponement until 2016, security concerns, non-issuance of visas or insufficient recipient follow-up.

<sup>23</sup> The remaining 200 requests were for capacity-building or research.

Figure V  
Policy support requests by Commission subprogramme, 2012-2015



Source: ESCWA programme data.

**While the Commission has contributed to some policies in the region, this influence has not been extensive**

43. During the biennium 2014-2015, ESCWA contributed to actual items of draft legislation and policies across various sectors in 13 countries, as shown in table 6, primarily through the provision of advisory services. For example, the Commission provided technical advice and facilitated the creation of a water management system and strategy and developed, in collaboration with national counterparts, a national development plan that included goals and indicators as well as a monitoring system (dashboard) to track them.

Table 6  
Commission contributions to member State policies, 2014-2015

| Member State(s)      | Subprogramme            | Policy area                   |
|----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| State of Palestine   | Sustainable development | Water policy                  |
|                      | Social development      | Gender sensitivity            |
| United Arab Emirates |                         | Youth policy                  |
| Sudan                |                         | Integrated social policy      |
| Saudi Arabia         | Economic development    | National development planning |
| Lebanon              |                         | Macroeconomic policy          |
| Egypt and Jordan     |                         | Public-private partnership    |

| <i>Member State(s)</i>                | <i>Subprogramme</i>        | <i>Policy area</i>               |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia | Technology for development | E-commerce legislation           |
| Egypt                                 |                            | Communications technology policy |
| Saudi Arabia                          | Statistics                 | National accounts                |
| Yemen                                 | Women                      | Gender equality                  |
| Iraq                                  |                            | Gender-based violence            |
| Yemen                                 | Conflict                   | National dialogue                |

*Source:* Programme performance report, technical cooperation report, interviews and case studies.

44. Notwithstanding the examples set out in table 6, however, ESCWA staff and member States provided mixed assessments of the Commission's policy influence in the region. None of the five member State survey respondents rated ESCWA effective in supporting policy formulation, stating that they did not know whether it had been successful in that regard. Government officials interviewed from four member States stated that they could see no influence of the Commission's work on policy formulation in the region. A majority of the Commission's staff (59 per cent) rated its policy influence in the region more positively, although the remaining 41 per cent did not have a positive view of that influence and noted that more could be done to maximize it.

45. External stakeholders cited a lack of awareness about ESCWA advisory services as a challenge that limited policy influence. Four senior government officials from two member States visited on mission expressed their desire for ESCWA technical advisory services, including advice on statistics, gender mainstreaming and water management, but did not know how to obtain them.

**The Commission has helped to build member State capacity, but the links between capacity-building and policy changes are unclear**

46. ESCWA has made a number of positive contributions with respect to building the capacity of its member States. During the biennium 2010-2015, it successfully delivered on all expected accomplishments related to capacity-building, through 69 workshops. Some external stakeholders interviewed cited successful examples of ESCWA capacity-building activities and stated that they had increased the skills and knowledge of technical officers in national Governments; examples included training in the areas of climate change, economic development, national accounts, information technology, disability, addressing violence against women, and road safety. Most staff survey respondents (73 per cent) expressed the view that the Commission's technical assistance had helped member States in the region to better respond to their own economic and social development policy needs.

47. Despite the assumption that improved capacity leads to improved policy formulation, however, ESCWA has been unable to clearly demonstrate that link. The Commission's programme performance report for the biennium 2014-2015, as

reported in IMDIS as at 31 January 2016, contained at least five examples of reported results related to policy influence across subprogrammes that showed an unclear connection between its capacity-building activities and its policy influence in the region. The example shown in table 7, cited in the Commission's programme performance report for 2014-2015, illustrates this weak connection, lack of specificity with regard to actual policies influenced and lack of systematic reporting on the contributions to actual policies and strategies developed. Whereas the indicator of achievement refers to the number of policies, plans and strategies adopted, the actual results reported refer to training and capacity-building but do not address the actual number of policies adopted.

Table 7

**Example of Commission programme performance reporting demonstrating an inadequate connection between capacity-building and policy influence**

**Expected accomplishment:** Enhanced capacities of member countries to develop and implement national, subregional and regional policies, strategies and action plans for the sustainable management of water, energy and land

**Indicator of achievement:** Increased number of policies, plans and strategies adopted by relevant ministries in member countries addressing water, energy and land needs

**Result:** Through capacity-building support from ESCWA, Yemeni officials were trained on appropriate mechanisms to promote investment in renewable energy and energy efficiency projects, and thus were enabled to adopt a strategy on financing renewable energy systems and expressed a willingness to do so in the future. Therefore, ESCWA support helped to increase indicator b (i) by one strategy

*Source:* Partial programme performance report entries as reported by 31 January 2016.

## **E. The Commission has not adequately linked its three core functions to support policy formulation**

48. The links and complementarities between the three core functions of ESCWA — consensus-building, research and analysis, and advisory services — which should work together to support its objectives, are difficult to discern. While the Commission's support for policy formulation is one of its key cross-cutting goals, the three core functions, while individually important, are not sufficiently integrated to achieve that goal.<sup>24</sup> First, the knowledge generated through its research and analysis is not sufficiently disseminated and promoted so that it can increase awareness and be used to better inform the decision-making of member States. Second, there is no clear strategy to guide its advisory services in effectively responding to and facilitating the implementation of decisions and agreements reached through its consensus-building and intergovernmental processes. Third, there is inconsistent follow-up after advisory services are rendered to integrate any

<sup>24</sup> See A/69/6 (Prog. 19).

new knowledge gained into the Commission's research and analysis and consensus-building functions.

49. The Commission's resources specifically devoted to regional expertise are rather limited; it currently has six regional advisers. Those advisers have not been able to consistently attend the meetings of the subsidiary bodies in order to better tailor technical support to the issues on which they focus. While ESCWA research and analysis outputs are often produced without the full benefit of the experience and knowledge gained by the advisers when working with member States, regular staff are also increasingly delivering technical assistance.

50. As indicated in paragraph 48 above, the Commission's core functions of consensus-building, research and analysis and advisory services are not fully integrated to support its overall mandate; however, it is currently taking steps to strengthen those linkages. This is being done primarily through a reconceptualization of its work programme to align itself with the three strategic pillars of inclusive development, regional integration, and good governance and resilience. In doing so, ESCWA is also attempting to address the challenge of divisional silos and promote interdivisional collaboration. While this focus on three pillars is aimed at supporting cross-functional complementarity, it also adds an additional layer of coordination to the Commission's work. This reconceptualization is also being implemented in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals and therefore is still evolving.

**F. The Commission has taken preliminary steps to respond to member States' demand for follow-up and support on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals**

**The Commission played a key role in facilitating a regional position on the Goals**

51. As noted previously, ESCWA played a significant role in facilitating the process of regional consultation, prioritization and consensus-building carried out prior to the global negotiations on the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2014, following the initial provision of support for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, ESCWA launched the Arab High-level Forum on Sustainable Development. The Forum provided a platform for discussing the regional sustainable development priorities that informed and shaped the ministerial declarations and positions on the post-2015 development agenda. At the same time, ESCWA initiated discussions with member States through its subsidiary committees, as well as with other United Nations organizations, on the steps needed to ensure the implementation of and follow-up to the Sustainable Development Goals. At the twenty-first meeting of the Regional Coordination Mechanism, held in November 2015, it was agreed that ESCWA would chair the thematic working group on the Sustainable Development Goals at the level of United Nations regional directors, as well as the Task Force on Statistics.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> See E/ESCWA/OFS/2015/RCM.21.

**Member States have expressed an increased demand for regional coordination and support for implementation, monitoring and reporting on progress with respect to the Sustainable Development Goals**

52. Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, member States have been engaged in identifying effective ways to integrate and adapt their institutional structures, align their plans and strengthen their capacities to roll out its implementation and monitoring. On mission, eight government officials (from four countries) indicated that they were particularly interested in receiving further assistance in sectoral areas such as planning, statistics, social development, water and transport. It is clear that in this regard, ESCWA can provide relevant expertise and support in critical thematic areas that are at the core of the Sustainable Development Goals. While technical ministries have not received any specific communications from the Commission's technical counterparts, last November ESCWA presented its Executive Committee with a strategy and plan of action<sup>26</sup> that sets out approaches, priorities and details with regard to how it intends to support countries in their implementation of the Goals. The strategy and plan of action was endorsed by the Executive Committee in December 2015. Moving forward, it will need to be translated into concrete action plans that provide options for supporting member States in meeting their planning and implementation needs.

## V. Conclusion

53. Despite working in a complex environment under political and security constraints, ESCWA has been able to play an important catalytic role in sparking dialogue and debate on the critical issues facing its member States. It has facilitated consensus in important areas, such as governance, gender and social justice, which have advanced progress in the region and set the stage for continuing growth and development. Its particular comparative advantage of providing a neutral, strategic and evidence-based platform for reflecting and deciding upon often challenging topics has been well utilized in facilitating the adoption of decisions and agreements that unify the region in terms of a common goal of sustainable development.

54. In the context of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, ESCWA will be called upon to play a central role in supporting member States in their efforts to implement and monitor the Sustainable Development Goals. Its regional mandate and technical expertise are well aligned with the key needs of its member States for support. Whether it be adapting national development plans, strengthening national statistical capacities, promoting social development or trade issues, or championing regional cooperation, ESCWA is well positioned to provide the type of assistance that its member States will need to be successful in making the transition from conflict and unrest to political, economic and social stability.

55. In its efforts to accompany the region in that transition, ESCWA will need to strengthen its role as a think tank, regional forum and adviser. In particular, it will need to strengthen its overall work programme, moving further away from subprogramme silos and closer to a more integrated approach that effectively links

<sup>26</sup> E/ESCWA/2015/EC.2/4 (Part 1).

its three core functions. While those three functions are important inputs for policy formulation, more is required in order to influence policy. ESCWA will need to provide a full range of policy tools and options and help to build policy networks to strengthen regional institutional frameworks for policymaking. Given its resource constraints, ESCWA will also need to better leverage partnerships with other United Nations entities, as well as civil society, for a more comprehensive strategy for supporting its member States. Its ability to ensure that information is exchanged and lessons are learned will also be critical to optimizing its role in that regard.

56. The Commission's Sustainable Development Goals strategy and action plan are positive steps in the right direction in terms of being responsive to the needs of its member States for support in implementing the Goals. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development offers a critical opportunity for ESCWA to reflect on its achievements, identify gaps where it can improve its performance, and strengthen its capacity to bridge global and national priorities through its unique regional role, expertise and perspective.

## VI. Recommendations

57. OIOS makes five important recommendations to ESCWA, as set out below.

### Recommendation 1 (result B)

58. **ESCWA should strengthen its capacity to address newly emerging priority issues in the region and unplanned requests for support by creating a means for more regular and systematic dialogue and consultation with member States, including through the Executive Committee.**

*Indicator of achievement:* Discussion of emerging issues at sessions of the Executive Committee or other intergovernmental body

### Recommendation 2 (result C)

59. **ESCWA should implement the recommendations resulting from its current publications reform and further strengthen the utility of its publications by developing and implementing a comprehensive publications strategy that includes guidelines on dissemination, communication and advocacy as well as performance indicators and feedback mechanisms to regularly track progress, including targets on clientele and distribution.**

*Indicator of achievement:* Recommendations from reform implemented and publication strategy document with target dates for implementation of each component

### Recommendation 3 (result D)

60. **ESCWA should strengthen its methodologies for collecting, analysing and reporting on programme performance data in order to better address the longer-term outcomes of its three core functions, and to more effectively demonstrate the linkage between them.**

*Indicator of achievement:* Enhanced programme performance system with clear methodologies and data collection tools

**Recommendation 4 (result E)**

61. ESCWA should develop a detailed strategy and action plan for strengthening the linkages between its three core functions of consensus-building, research and analysis, and advisory services. The action plan should clearly define activities, time frames, authority and accountability for the steps to be taken to enhance these linkages. It should be developed with consideration given to the already developed ESCWA strategy on the Sustainable Development Goals.

*Indicator of achievement:* Action plan with follow-up mechanism for all functional areas

**Recommendation 5 (result F)**

62. ESCWA should further enhance its capacity to implement the Sustainable Development Goals strategy by proposing options to increase the support provided to member States on mainstreaming, implementing and monitoring the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in national development planning processes. In implementing this recommendation, consideration should be given to establishing dedicated capacity and resources for supporting the Sustainable Development Goals.

*Indicator of achievement:* Options on strengthening member State capacity to implement the Sustainable Development Goals at the regional and national levels, including through national development plans

(Signed) Heidi **Mendoza**  
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services  
March 2017

## Annex

### Formal comments provided by the Commission

The Office for Internal Oversight Services presents below the full text of the comments received from the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia on the evaluation of the Commission. This practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution 64/263, following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.

### Comments of the Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia on the evaluation of the Commission

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) thanks the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) for the opportunity to provide comments on the report on the above-referenced evaluation. ESCWA recognizes the importance of this evaluation and extends its appreciation to OIOS for its detailed findings and recommendations.

ESCWA welcomes the report's recognition of the key strengths and challenges faced by the institution. Among the key strengths that the report cites are: the Commission's strategic efforts in facilitating regional consensus and initiating debate on global and regional priority issues; the Commission's substantive engagement on issues of regional concern, in particular for countries in transition; and the Commission's active engagement with member States regarding the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and support for the work of member States on the Sustainable Development Goals.

ESCWA has reviewed the report carefully and welcomes its findings and recommendations, which encourage greater performance monitoring and reporting for long-term results, along with the implementation of a comprehensive publications strategy and the expansion of its strategic partnerships. To that end, ESCWA is preparing a detailed action plan, both building on work already under way and forming task teams reporting to senior management to draft additional action plans and standard operating procedures in response to these recommendations.

ESCWA is in agreement with the recommendations contained in the report and would like to add the following observations:

#### Recommendation 1

The Arab region has faced a growing number of emerging issues in recent years, including, but not limited to, conflict and instability, forced migration, rising poverty and inequality, environmental degradation and unemployment (especially among youth and women). ESCWA agrees with this recommendation and is committed to facilitating ongoing dialogue and consultations on these and other new and emerging priority issues with all its member States through its intergovernmental bodies, including its Executive Committee, its multi-stakeholder forums and other regional platforms.

**Recommendation 2**

As a normative organization dedicated to regional knowledge production, ESCWA considers its publications to be the cornerstone of its work. ESCWA is in agreement with this recommendation and has already begun embarking upon the development of a publications strategy and plan of action.

**Recommendation 3**

ESCWA agrees with this recommendation, particularly on the importance of capturing and reporting on the longer-term results of its normative work. In that regard, ESCWA has revised the scope of work of its monitoring function and is actively reviewing options for adopting the best-suited programme performance system that meets the needs of the Commission.

**Recommendation 4**

ESCWA views its three core functions of consensus-building, research and analysis, and advisory services as mutually reinforcing and integral to the delivery of its mandate. ESCWA agrees with this recommendation and will be acting accordingly in its planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation activities, building on the efforts already acknowledged in the evaluation report to further strengthen the linkages between its three core functions.

**Recommendation 5**

The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals are integral to the development of the Arab region and to the Commission's mandate, and ESCWA fully agrees with this recommendation. ESCWA has assigned dedicated staff to support regional and national efforts on the 2030 Agenda and will continue to expand upon its provision of unique services related to the achievement of the Goals.

In conclusion, ESCWA would like to thank OIOS for this comprehensive evaluation report. As it reflects on strategies and modalities for further sharpening its outputs and services, ESCWA will benefit from the findings and recommendations presented in the report. ESCWA will continue to ensure that its three core functions are mutually reinforcing and that they capitalize on its strategic value in support of member States in the achievement of the goals of the new sustainable development agenda.



## Economic and Social Council

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### Committee for Programme and Coordination

Fifty-seventh session

Organizational session, 20 April 2017

Substantive session, 5-30 June 2017

Programme questions: evaluation

### Evaluation of the Economic Commission for Europe

#### Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

#### *Summary*

The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) was created in 1947 to confront the devastation in Europe left in the wake of the Second World War. With the breakup of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in the 1990s, its membership expanded by one third, and it currently serves an economically varied group of 56 member States from Europe, North America and Asia.

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) examined the relevance and effectiveness of ECE and the extent to which it is fit for purpose to support member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The evaluation was conducted using surveys, interviews, on-site visits, case studies, direct observation, document reviews and secondary data analyses.

ECE has effectively facilitated the establishment of critical conventions, regulations, norms and standards that have had both regional and global impact, by providing a neutral space for experts from its member countries and beyond to negotiate, discuss and generate useful, concrete products. Those products have included legally binding conventions in the transport and environment sectors and hundreds of standards, classifications and recommendations in such diverse areas as statistics, public-private partnerships, trade, housing, forestry and energy. ECE provides a platform for decision makers to discuss policy, and a variety of ECE processes involve the provision of policy advice.

In order to achieve those results, ECE has navigated the extensive intergovernmental machinery effectively, but it has been challenged by the demands placed on its secretariat role and faces the risk of losing its institutional memory in



playing that role. Servicing such a large number of bodies in distinct and highly specialized areas has also affected the ECE secretariat's ability to be more flexible, particularly with regard to working across sectors and subprogrammes. ECE has also faced competing and, at times, conflicting member State demands and priorities stemming in part from different economic needs and historical and geopolitical trends.

While many ECE products have been adopted and have been useful in non-member countries, ECE lacks a common understanding of and clear strategy on its global reach beyond its regional role.

Since the 1990s, ECE has also assumed a larger role in providing technical assistance to countries with economies in transition in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. It has adequately targeted the countries most in need in the region; however, its funding for and focus on technical cooperation has been low and dispersed.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a critical opportunity for ECE to examine how its activities under existing norms, standards, conventions and related review mechanisms and statistical work can contribute to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. ECE has already taken concrete steps to do so, including identifying and mapping relevant activities, surveying member States and holding discussions within sectoral committees. While ECE has the necessary expertise to support member States, particularly with regard to monitoring frameworks in the context of environmental conventions and in peer reviews as part of country assessments, it faces several issues as it moves forward. They include weak intersectoral collaboration, expanded workloads and the need to enhance partnerships, particularly with the private sector and civil society.

OIOS makes five important recommendations to ECE:

- Develop and operationalize a knowledge management strategy
- Conduct a mapping of intersectoral and interdivisional initiatives and activities
- Develop a proposal, for presentation to the Executive Committee, that explores the nature of its global focus
- Examine how its activities under existing norms, standards, conventions and related review mechanisms and statistical work can contribute to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals
- Undertake the mapping of existing partnerships and cooperation with non-State actors and develop specific proposals for expanding and strengthening such cooperation in support of the Sustainable Development Goals

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## I. Introduction and objective

1. The Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) identified the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) for evaluation on the basis of a risk assessment undertaken by OIOS to identify Secretariat programme evaluation priorities. The Committee for Programme and Coordination selected the programme evaluation of ECE for consideration at its fifty-seventh session, in June 2017 (see A/70/16). The General Assembly endorsed the selection in its resolution 70/8.

2. The general frame of reference for OIOS is set out in General Assembly resolutions 48/218 B, 54/244 and 59/272, as well as Secretary-General's bulletin ST/SGB/273, which confers on OIOS the authority to initiate, carry out and report on any action that it considers necessary to fulfil its responsibilities. OIOS evaluation is provided for in regulation 7.1 of the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (ST/SGB/2016/6).

3. The overall evaluation objective was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance and effectiveness of the work of ECE and the extent to which it is prepared to support member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The evaluation topic emerged from a programme-level risk assessment described in detail in the evaluation inception paper.<sup>1</sup> The evaluation has been conducted in conformity with the norms and standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group.

4. The ECE secretariat management's comments on the draft report were sought and taken into account in the preparation of the final report. The formal ECE response is included in the annex.

## II. Background

### Mandate, governance and organizational structure

5. ECE was created on 28 March 1947 by Economic and Social Council resolution 36 (IV) to support post-war reconstruction and promote the integration and economic cooperation of European countries. At the outset, ECE was composed of 18 member States from Europe, and the United States of America. In the next 30 years, Canada, Cyprus and 13 more European countries joined the organization, and between 1991 and 1995 membership increased by 21 more countries from Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Two further additions in the past 15 years brought the final count to 56 member States. ECE membership is diverse, spanning countries with very high, high and medium human development.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> OIOS/Inspection and Evaluation Division, Inception paper: programme evaluation of the Economic Commission for Europe (IED-16-003), 26 June 2015.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Country profiles, Human development reports. Available from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries>.

6. The main objective of ECE is to pursue sustainable development and regional cooperation and integration through three interrelated functions:<sup>3</sup>

(a) Policy dialogue, which provides a neutral platform for dialogue on economic, social and environmental issues;

(b) Normative work, which facilitates the development and negotiation of new norms, standards and conventions;

(c) Technical cooperation, which promotes the integration of member countries into the world economy.

7. ECE is governed by its terms of reference and rules of procedure (E/ECE/778/Rev.5), revised in 2009. It is governed by the Economic Commission for Europe, which meets biennially. Between those sessions, review and guidance of the intergovernmental sectoral committees and implementation of the ECE secretariat work programme are carried out on behalf of the Commission by the Executive Committee.

8. Eight sectoral committees act as governing bodies for the eight ECE subprogrammes.<sup>4</sup> The ECE secretariat services the committees, as well as their subsidiary bodies. The eight committees are as follows:

(a) Inland Transport Committee;

(b) Committee on Environmental Policy;

(c) Conference of European Statisticians;

(d) Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry;

(e) Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships;

(f) Committee on Sustainable Energy;

(g) Committee on Housing and Land Management;

(h) Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards.

9. During the period 2014-2015, ECE had 313 staff members. It comprises the Office of the Executive Secretary and eight substantive subprogrammes implemented by six divisions, as shown in table 1.

Table 1  
Subprogrammes and divisions in ECE

| <i>Subprogramme</i> | <i>Division</i>                |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| Environment         | Environment Division           |
| Transport           | Sustainable Transport Division |
| Statistics          | Statistical Division           |

<sup>3</sup> See A/68/6 (Sect. 20) and A/70/6 (Sect. 20).

<sup>4</sup> Environmental and transport conventions have their own governing bodies.

| <i>Schprogramme</i>                  | <i>Division</i>                         |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Sustainable energy                   | Sustainable Energy Division             |
| Housing and land management          | Forest, Land and Housing Division       |
| Forestry and timber                  |                                         |
| Economic cooperation and integration | Economic Cooperation and Trade Division |
| Trade                                |                                         |

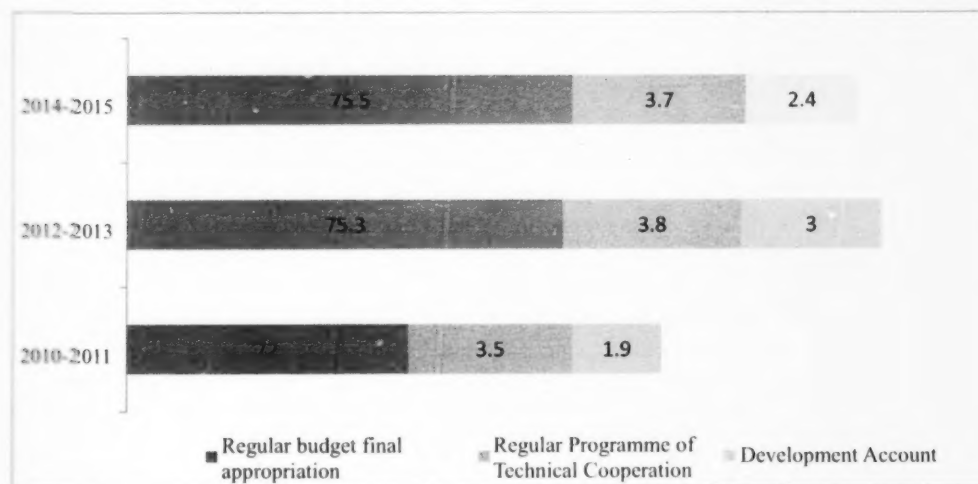
Source: ECE website.

### Resources

10. The projected resources of ECE for 2014-2015 amounted to \$81.6 million, with 92 per cent coming from the regular budget. This represents a decrease in total planned resources from the previous biennium, attributable to decreases of 20 per cent and 2.6 per cent in the Development Account and the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation, respectively. Figure I shows planned resources for the past three bienniums.

Figure I  
ECE biennium budgets, 2010-2015

(Millions of United States dollars)



Source: ECE.

### III. Methodology

11. The time frame for the evaluation was primarily the period 2012-2015. Selected data and information from earlier years were also reviewed to support the analysis of particular thematic issues.

12. All evaluation results are based on a triangulation of multiple data sources collected through a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, including:

(a) Document review: review of key documents, including strategic frameworks; budgets and programme documents; Executive Committee meeting minutes; sectoral committee meeting reports; technical cooperation project documents; audit and evaluation documents; and documents related to the 2030 Agenda;

(b) Interviews: 87 semi-structured interviews with a non-random sample of ECE management and staff; representatives of member States and partner organizations, including other United Nations entities; intergovernmental organizations; the European Commission; and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD);

(c) Surveys: three self-administered web-based surveys of sectoral committee members, member States and ECE staff;<sup>5</sup>

(d) Direct observation of two Executive Committee meetings by videoconference in October and November 2015; an annual session of a sectoral committee (Committee on Environmental Policy) in Geneva in October 2015; and the Economic Forum and the Governing Council of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia in Tajikistan in November 2015;

(e) Case studies: in-depth studies of nine ECE areas of work.<sup>6</sup> OIOS based its selection on predefined criteria<sup>7</sup> and in consultation with the relevant ECE divisions. Each case study included a variety of data collection methods, including interviews with government representatives, members of committees and/or working groups and other individuals from the private sector or civil society; short surveys of relevant stakeholders; focused e-mail questionnaires; and document reviews;

<sup>5</sup> OIOS conducted the surveys in September and October 2015. The staff survey was sent to all 313 Professional and General Service staff, consultants and interns. A total of 176 responded, a 56 per cent response rate. The sectoral committee survey was sent to 464 current members of the eight sectoral committees. A total of 100 responded, a 24 per cent response rate. The survey of member States was sent to 56 Geneva-based missions and the European Union. Eight responded, a 14 per cent response rate.

<sup>6</sup> One from each ECE subprogramme (two from Transport) were selected as case studies. The areas were: air pollution; road safety; inland water transport; sustainable housing and real estate markets; data, monitoring and assessment to influence policy dialogue in forestry; innovation and competitiveness; gas; trade facilitation and electronic business; and social and demographic statistics. Case study analyses were integrated into the evaluation results as an additional source of evidence.

<sup>7</sup> Case study selection criteria included coverage of all subprogrammes, resources, substantial work to date, global and regional focus and observation of meetings.

(f) Missions to ECE headquarters in Geneva; the European Union headquarters in Brussels; the offices of OECD and other international organizations in Paris; and the tenth session of the Governing Council of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia, held in Dushanbe.

13. The collection of evaluation data was limited by the low response rate of the member State survey.

14. OIOS consulted the ECE secretariat during the conduct of the evaluation and expresses its gratitude to the secretariat for its cooperation and assistance.

#### IV. Evaluation results

##### A. ECE has effectively facilitated the establishment of critical conventions, norms and standards that have had a regional and global impact

###### **ECE has effectively supported the negotiation of legally binding instruments and the development of standards**

15. Since its creation, ECE has played a key role in the negotiation of 74 legally binding international instruments<sup>8</sup> in transport (58) and the environment (16). It facilitated the development of hundreds of voluntary standards, classifications, action plans and recommendations, as shown in table 2.

Table 2  
**ECE outputs, by subprogramme, 1948-2016**

| <i>Subprogramme</i>                                          | <i>Output</i> | <i>Examples</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <i>Number</i> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>Legally binding conventions, agreements and protocols</b> |               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |               |
| Environment                                                  | Convention    | Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 5             |
| Environment                                                  | Protocol      | Protocol to the 1979 Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution on Persistent Organic Pollutants                                                                                                                                                                   | 11            |
| Transport                                                    | Convention    | Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods under Cover of TIR Carnets (TIR Convention)                                                                                                                                                                       |               |
| Transport                                                    | Agreement     | Agreement concerning the Adoption of Uniform Technical Prescriptions for Wheeled Vehicles, Equipment and Parts which can be Fitted and/or be Used on Wheeled Vehicles and the Conditions for Reciprocal Recognition of Approvals Granted on the Basis of these Prescriptions | 58            |

<sup>8</sup> These include conventions, protocols and agreements but not the 136 legally binding vehicle regulations annexed to the Agreement concerning the Adoption of Uniform Technical Prescriptions for Wheeled Vehicles, Equipment and Parts which can be Fitted and/or be Used on Wheeled Vehicles and the Conditions for Reciprocal Recognition of Approvals Granted on the Basis of these Prescriptions.

| <i>Subprogramme</i>                                                                     | <i>Output</i>  | <i>Examples</i>                                                                                             | <i>Number</i> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>Non-legally binding standards, classifications, action plans and recommendations</b> |                |                                                                                                             |               |
| Statistics                                                                              |                | Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics                                                               | >30           |
| Trade                                                                                   | Standard       | Standard concerning the marketing and commercial quality control of apples                                  | >100          |
| Economic cooperation and integration                                                    |                | Standard on public-private partnerships in health-care policy                                               | 9             |
| Transport                                                                               | Classification | Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals                                     | 1             |
| Sustainable energy                                                                      |                | United Nations Framework Classification for Fossil Energy and Mineral Reserves and Resources                | 1             |
| Forestry and timber                                                                     | Action plan    | Rovaniemi Action Plan for the Forest Sector in a Green Economy                                              | 1             |
| Housing                                                                                 |                | Geneva Charter on Sustainable Housing                                                                       | 1             |
| Sustainable energy                                                                      | Recommendation | Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) and CCS for Enhanced Oil Recovery (EOR) in a Post-Kyoto Protocol Agreement | 15            |
| Trade                                                                                   |                | Code for the Representation of Names of Countries (recommendation No. 3)                                    | 40            |
| Sustainable energy                                                                      | Best practice  | Best Practice Guidance for Effective Methane Drainage and Use in Coal Mines                                 | 1             |

Source: ECE, Compendium of legal instruments, norms and standards, 2015.

16. ECE is recognized positively in playing this important role. In surveys, 82 per cent of sectoral committee members and 88 per cent of staff rated ECE as effective in helping to develop standards and technical recommendations. Similarly, 72 per cent of sectoral committee members and 81 per cent of staff rated ECE as effective in the development of legally binding regulations, standards and technical recommendations. All eight member State representatives who responded to the survey concurred that ECE was successful in helping to negotiate legally binding instruments.

#### **ECE has also been effective in servicing conventions**

17. ECE has significant experience in the servicing and administration of legally binding conventions, which require sustaining a network of convention bodies, such as implementation committees and working groups; organizing meetings and sessions; preparing documents, agendas and reports; and collecting information and disseminating it to participants. Servicing conventions has meant ensuring that legal instruments evolve and stay up to date and seeking further ratifications when appropriate, which are crucial to maintaining their relevance.

18. The need to ensure that legal instruments stay up to date is particularly important in the environment and in transport, two spheres where scientific and technical advances compelled adjustments to agreements negotiated years or decades earlier. In the environment, this has taken the form of protocols to conventions, or "soft law" voluntary recommendations and resolutions based on

new developments and good practices. For example, the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution was originally signed in 1979, but since then ECE has facilitated the negotiation of additional protocols addressing the emissions of eight specific air pollutants. In transport, for example, the Working Party on Road Traffic Safety and the World Forum for the Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations continued to update conventions negotiated decades ago. With regard to vehicle regulations, there have been 136 new such regulations since the Agreement concerning the Adoption of Uniform Technical Prescriptions for Wheeled Vehicles, Equipment and Parts which can be Fitted and/or be Used on Wheeled Vehicles and the Conditions for Reciprocal Recognition of Approvals Granted on the Basis of these Prescriptions. Those regulations have addressed issues that evolve over time, such as automotive brakes or safety belts.

19. Keeping conventions relevant also involves obtaining new ratifications, which has been challenging. In 2014-2015, ECE achieved its target of new ratifications for two out of six conventions or protocols.<sup>9</sup> In the environment, for example, ECE multilateral environmental agreements reached a peak of new ratifications in 2009, but the trend has been declining in subsequent years (ECE/CEP/2014/16, para. 86).

**ECE conventions have contributed to positive impacts in global public health and safety, democracy and cross-border trade**

20. Table 3 shows examples of ECE conventions that resulted in positive global outcomes.

Table 3

**Examples of positive global outcomes resulting from ECE conventions**

| <i>Convention</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <i>Positive outcome</i>                                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Agreement concerning the Adoption of Uniform Technical Prescriptions for Wheeled Vehicles, Equipment and Parts which can be Fitted and/or be Used on Wheeled Vehicles and the Conditions for Reciprocal Recognition of Approvals Granted on the Basis of these Prescriptions | Enhanced safety for car occupants and pedestrians; reduced emission and fuel consumption from vehicles |
| TIR Convention                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | More efficient cross-border trade                                                                      |
| Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention)                                                                                                                              | Enhanced public access to environmental information                                                    |

<sup>9</sup> OIOS analysis based on targets in the biennial performance plan of the Environment subprogramme for 2014-2015 (ECE/CEP/2014/4) and the updated list of ratifications in <http://treaties.un.org>

| <i>Convention</i>                                                 | <i>Positive outcome</i>                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution <sup>a</sup> | Reductions of airborne emissions in the ECE region |

*Sources:* Aurélie Slechten and Vincenzo Verardi, "Measuring the impact of multiple air-pollution agreements on global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions", Economics Working Paper Series, No. 2014-010 (Lancaster, United Kingdom, Lancaster University Management School, 2014); Kareen el-Beyrouthy and Andrew Tessler, "Economic and competitiveness gains from the adoption of best practices in intermodal maritime and road transport in the Americas: the TIR system as an example of a best practice", October 2014, report of the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment (A/HRC/31/53).

<sup>a</sup> The ECE region has seen decreasing emissions in the range of 18-70 per cent.

21. In the wider scheme of international legal frameworks, ECE conventions and agreements influenced other regional and global instruments, such as European Union directives. In the environment, the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) influenced the Water Framework Directive of the European Union.<sup>10</sup> In transport, the European Agreements concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road and by Inland Waterways were integrated into the European Union directive on the inland transport of dangerous goods, and the rules set out by those Agreements were extended to national transport operations in all European Union member countries.<sup>11</sup> Environmental conventions have inspired the normative content of such international instruments as the 1998 Aarhus Protocol on Heavy Metals, which influenced the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

22. With the exception of environmental conventions, ECE does not systematically monitor and report on the use and impacts of its conventions, norms and standards. It adopts an informal approach to communicating to the general public the ways in which its work affects the daily life of citizens in a section on its website entitled "How we impact your daily life".

#### **The use of ECE non-legally binding products was generally high**

23. ECE voluntary products, such as standards, classifications, action plans, charters and recommendations, are public goods that member States and non-State actors can use if they find them valuable. Overall, 73 per cent of sectoral committee member survey respondents indicated that in the past five years their country had used one of those ECE products. The case studies provided examples of products used, including the Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide, the Rovaniemi Action Plan and the Consolidated Resolution on Road Traffic. In the context of the statistics case study, all seven national officials from national statistics offices confirmed that their country had used the Recommendations for the Censuses of Population and Housing.

<sup>10</sup> David Blundell, "The influence of Aarhus on domestic and European Union law: access to information", February 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Directive 2008/68/EC (5).

**B. ECE technical cooperation projects support normative work and, for the most part, appropriately targeted countries in need; however, they are concentrated in one subprogramme**

**Overall technical cooperation supports ECE normative work, but project budgets are concentrated in the environment**

24. ECE technical cooperation activities aim to improve the capacity of Governments to implement ECE legal instruments, norms, standards and regulations as set out in the ECE Technical Cooperation Strategy (E/ECE/1447/Add.2). An OIOS review of 56 technical cooperation projects in the period from 2006 to 2015<sup>12</sup> confirmed that a majority (38 of 56) of projects broadly supported the development or implementation of the ECE normative framework. A subset of those projects (21) made a direct link with a specific ECE convention, norm or standard. This is particularly the case in the environment, where, out of 17 projects, 13 supported the implementation of one of the ECE environmental conventions or protocols.

25. The environment subprogramme commanded a majority of technical cooperation extrabudgetary expenditures (69 per cent), while other subprogrammes, such as housing and energy, accounted for approximately 2 per cent each. The variety of thematic areas covered by ECE, and its limited technical cooperation budget, implied a wide dispersal of funds and many projects with a smaller budget. Of 56 projects reviewed, 41 per cent had a budget of \$100,000 or less. For example, agricultural quality standards, numbering more than 100, had one technical cooperation project in support of their implementation. A review of data from the Integrated Monitoring and Document Information System showed that 7 per cent of ECE outputs and 16 per cent of ECE staff work-months were devoted to technical cooperation in 2014-2015.

**ECE technical cooperation had, for the most part, appropriately targeted the less developed transition economies in the region**

26. The ECE target countries for technical cooperation are "transition economies".<sup>13</sup> Within transition economies, there is a wide range of economic development.<sup>14</sup> The review of information on projects and activities funded from extrabudgetary resources and provided on the project monitoring tool revealed that the majority had focused on the group of transition, non-European Union countries.<sup>15</sup> As shown in table 4, the four less developed countries of the ECE region<sup>16</sup> were among those most often serviced by ECE technical cooperation activities. ECE states that its technical cooperation is demand driven,<sup>17</sup> which might explain why Belarus and Kazakhstan, which are not among the poorest, were the

<sup>12</sup> All projects with start or end dates between 2010 and 2015 in the ECE project monitoring tool were included in the analysis. The review comprised all extrabudgetary projects appearing in the ECE project monitoring tool with a technical cooperation project form.

<sup>13</sup> Transition economies are those moving from a central planning to a market economy. 25 ECE members fall under the category.

<sup>14</sup> Eleven transition economies joined the European Union.

<sup>15</sup> One support project was to a non-transition country.

<sup>16</sup> Based on UNDP and World Bank rankings.

<sup>17</sup> See E/ECE/1447/Add.2.

committees stand out as targeted. In comparison, other countries in the low- to middle-income bracket, such as Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine, were less represented in ECE technical cooperation projects. Most committee members and staff surveyed (78 per cent and 84 per cent, respectively) indicated that ECE had targeted the countries most in need in the region.

Table 4  
Countries with ECE technical cooperation projects, 2006-2017

| Country             | Number of technical cooperation projects | Human development index <sup>a</sup> | World Bank income ranking <sup>b</sup> |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Bulgaria            | 12                                       | High human development               | Upper middle income                    |
| Kazakhstan          | 11                                       | High human development               | Upper middle income                    |
| Kyrgyzstan          | 11                                       | <b>Medium human development</b>      | <b>Low middle income</b>               |
| Tajikistan          | 10                                       | <b>Medium human development</b>      | <b>Low middle income</b>               |
| Turkmenistan        | 9                                        | Medium human development             | Upper middle income                    |
| Armenia             | 8                                        | High human development               | Upper middle income                    |
| Republic of Moldova | 8                                        | <b>Medium human development</b>      | <b>Low middle income</b>               |
| Uzbekistan          | 8                                        | <b>Medium human development</b>      | <b>Low middle income</b>               |
| Georgia             | 6                                        | High human development               | Low middle income                      |
| Belarus             | 5                                        | High human development               | Low middle income                      |
| Russian Federation  | 5                                        | High human development               | Upper middle income                    |
| Ukraine             | 4                                        | High human development               | Low middle income                      |

Source: ECE project monitoring tool.

Note: A country was included if it was mentioned specifically in the project form.

<sup>a</sup> See <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi>.

<sup>b</sup> See <http://data.worldbank.org/news/new-country-classifications-2015>.

27. ECE contributes to the United Nations Development Assistance Framework in all 17 countries in the ECE region.

### C. ECE has been effective in convening technical experts for its intergovernmental platforms but is challenged by the demands placed on its secretariat role and the risk of losing institutional memory

ECE has successfully summoned relevant technical expertise to develop its key outputs, effectively navigating the extensive secretariat machinery in the process

28. ECE has effectively facilitated the development of critical norms, standards and conventions through its ability to convene and guide discussions of global

experts and guide their decisions on the sectors in which it works. Some of the expert committees that it services have existed for more than 50 years, and ECE has acquired a rich history of institutional knowledge and expertise in their work. Servicing committees is one of the major activities of ECE, and it generally does so very effectively. In the 2014-2015 biennium, it produced 1,224 parliamentary documents and serviced 1,772 meetings, which represents the second-largest volume of secretariat services in the United Nations Secretariat.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, as noted in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (A/70/677-E/2016/48), for 2010-2014, a large majority (81 per cent) of ECE outputs consisted of documents and meetings serviced.

29. Overall, members of sectoral committees rated ECE highly in its performance of its secretariat role. A large majority of respondents to the sectoral committee survey (89 per cent) rated the secretariat support provided by ECE as excellent or good. More specifically, a majority (80 per cent or more) rated that support excellent or good with regard to the quality and timeliness of information provided, the responsiveness of staff and the servicing of meetings.

30. OIOS observed efficient servicing of meetings of the Committee on Environmental Policy and the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia as two examples of ECE secretariat work. During those meetings, ECE secretariat staff presented papers to facilitate discussion, responded to questions and neutrally guided some points in the discussion. This was observed during two meetings of the Executive Committee, at which ECE staff were responsive to the needs of Committee members.

31. More in-depth case study analyses of ECE work with a sample of experts revealed satisfaction among committee members. In the Conference of European Statisticians, all eight stakeholders interviewed rated ECE effectiveness highly in that role. Similarly, all eight noted that a relatively small team from the Statistical Division managed the work of the Conference and its working groups and task forces in a timely and high-quality manner. In the Working Party on Road Traffic Safety of the Inland Transport Committee, two thirds of the members interviewed commended the relevance of the work of ECE in supporting the expert group, noting that it was the only permanent intergovernmental body dealing with that important issue. Members of the Committee on Sustainable Energy also noted that, on gas, ECE does an excellent job in facilitating member State access to pools of expert knowledge on the topic.

32. ECE risks losing its strong capacity to service those expert committees if the institutional knowledge and lessons for doing so are not captured and shared within the organization. ECE staff members tend to stay with the organization for a relatively long period of time, on average more than 10 years, thus accumulating significant experience. Some 13 per cent of ECE staff are expected to retire within the next five years, including nearly all of its senior leadership. OIOS could not identify any systematic knowledge management mechanism for capturing, storing, sharing and integrating knowledge and lessons on how ECE does its work. Less

<sup>18</sup> The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights produced the largest volume.

than half of ECE staff survey respondents (40 per cent) stated that ECE was effective in integrating lessons learned into programme planning.

**The need for ECE to service numerous thematic committees has placed heavy demands on its staff and hindered cross-sectoral collaboration**

33. The significant demands placed on ECE staff by servicing committees, combined with the need to work in such distinct and highly specialized bodies, have been perceived by staff as negatively affecting their ability to be more innovative and flexible, as well as their ability to work across sectors and subprogrammes. Table 5 shows that ECE supports 218 bodies, including 31 convention bodies, 50 subsidiary bodies and 137 expert bodies.

Table 5  
**Number of intergovernmental bodies supported by ECE**

| <i>Subprogramme</i>                  | <i>Committee/convention governing body</i> | <i>Subsidiary body/working party</i> | <i>Group of experts/team of specialists/task force</i> |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Environment                          | 11                                         | 23                                   | 27                                                     |
| Transport                            | 13                                         | 22                                   | 55                                                     |
| Statistics                           | 1                                          | —                                    | 11                                                     |
| Sustainable energy                   | 1                                          | —                                    | 6                                                      |
| Housing and Land Management          | 1                                          | 2                                    | 1                                                      |
| Forestry and Timber                  | 1                                          | 1                                    | 8                                                      |
| Economic Cooperation and Integration | 1                                          | —                                    | 3                                                      |
| Trade                                | 2                                          | 2                                    | 26                                                     |
| <b>Total</b>                         | <b>31</b>                                  | <b>50</b>                            | <b>137</b>                                             |

Source: ECE.

34. There exist some examples of intersectoral work, such as the long-standing Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme and the ECE Joint Task Force on Energy Efficiency Standards in Buildings. In technical cooperation, a review of 56 projects revealed only 2 that referred to intersectoral work.<sup>19</sup> A review of annual reports covering the period from 2010 to 2015 from three committees, namely the Inland Transport Committee, the Committee on Environmental Policy and the Conference of European Statisticians, and observation of the Committee on Environmental Policy revealed limited reference to cross-sectoral activities, except for the Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, less than half of ECE staff survey respondents (34 per cent) rated ECE as effective in promoting linkages between subprogrammes, and nearly half (46 per cent) volunteered that better coordination and cohesion between divisions was needed for ECE to increase its effectiveness. In interviews, some staff members also stated that divisions

<sup>19</sup> The For Future Inland Transport Systems (ForFITS) Tool represents an effort on the part of the Sustainable Transport, Environment and Statistical Divisions to support more informed decisions about CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the transport sector.

<sup>20</sup> Environment and statistics.

operated as silos with limited interaction and synergies between them. Staff also identified weak intersectoral collaboration as the principal challenge that ECE would face in supporting member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

**D. ECE has effectively provided a neutral platform for dialogue and decision-making but faces competing and, at times, conflicting member State demands and priorities**

**ECE has provided a neutral platform for dialogue between member countries with different economic systems and development levels**

35. During its first decades of existence, ECE provided a forum in which member countries from two opposite economic and political systems met, engaged in dialogue and produced concrete technical outputs. That convening function endures, and at present ECE offers a neutral platform for member States with different levels of economic development to discuss and reach decisions on common issues. In interviews, member States, partners and staff overwhelmingly highlighted the ability of ECE to span such a wide range of geographical and developmental differences among its member countries as one of the main comparative advantages of the organization. Representatives from three multilateral organizations interviewed considered ECE as particularly strong in its knowledge of the context and challenges of the countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

**While the general work programme of ECE is steered by member States, the diversity in its membership has resulted in perspectives and priorities that were competing at times**

36. Member States define the general direction of the organization, as well as its specific work programme. OIOS observation of proceedings of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia, the Committee on Environmental Policy and the Executive Committee showed that member States were invested in the discussions and that their presence was strong and their representatives vocal. However, within that context, member States have had differing perspectives on the main focus of ECE, and it has been faced with the challenge of responding to divergent member State interests that stem in part from different economic needs, as well as historical and geopolitical trends. Following the ECE review process and in the context of budget cuts in 2011-2012, countries attempted to protect and promote the work areas that they considered most important, determined largely by their levels of economic development and/or their membership in other subregional entities. For the 28 member countries that are also members of the European Union, the value of ECE has been viewed primarily as being in its work in the environment, transport and statistics sectors. For non-European Union member countries, particularly those that are not yet members of the World Trade Organization, ECE work has been considered most critical in economic cooperation, innovation and trade. Furthermore, in interviews with member State representatives, some believed that ECE should limit its focus to the facilitation of norms and standards, while others encouraged ECE to work beyond that and into the policy realm. Some staff members interviewed also noted the challenge of working effectively in the context

of the political tensions that occasionally pervaded intergovernmental deliberations. Such competing demands have at times resulted in a lack of clarity and direction as to where to focus ECE resources.

37. A review of Executive Committee meeting minutes<sup>21</sup> also showed an increasing trend over the past five years of extensive member State involvement in project approval, including the allocation of resources and procedural matters. A very detailed level of engagement on the part of member States in project review and approval was also observed during the two Executive Committee meetings attended by the OIOS team. In interviews with representatives of eight member States, representatives reported that the high level of member State engagement was useful for ensuring the implementation of member State decisions and supervision of financial management. In contrast, other member State representatives and several partners and staff interviewed perceived the high degree of member State involvement to be overly demanding, particularly in view of a heavy secretariat workload.

## **E. ECE lacks a common understanding of and clear strategy on its global reach beyond its regional role**

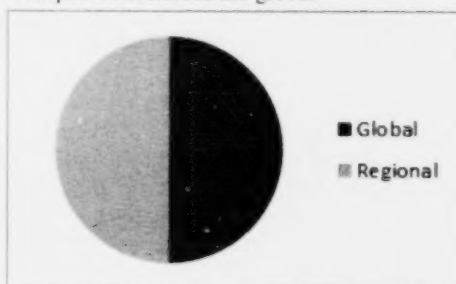
### **Numerous ECE conventions, norms and standards are global<sup>22</sup>**

38. As shown in figure II, more than half of ECE conventions in transport and the environment extend beyond the ECE region. The Water Convention was opened to non-member countries for ratification in 2015, and four countries have started national processes towards accession.

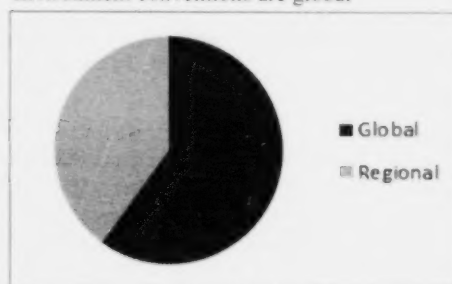
Figure II

### **ECE transport and environment conventions**

29 of 58 ECE  
transport conventions are global



3 of 5 ECE  
environment conventions are global



Source: ECE, Compendium of legal instruments, norms and standards, 2015

<sup>21</sup> OIOS conducted a review of 46 Executive Committee Chairman's conclusions from 2010 to 2015.

<sup>22</sup> OIOS deemed conventions global if they were acceded to or used by at least one non-member country.

39. Many of the ECE non-legally binding outputs are also global. Some recommendations, initially developed in the context of the ECE region, have been subsequently adopted worldwide, such as the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. Furthermore, there are 40 ECE trade recommendations, which aim to facilitate international transactions and are relevant beyond the ECE region. ECE also recently began facilitating the process of developing standards on public-private partnerships, meant to be practical to any country exploring different modalities of financing for public services.

#### **Non-member States also participated in ECE committees and subsidiary bodies**

40. Table 6 shows that, in 2015, countries outside the ECE region participated in five of the eight sectoral committees. That participation also extended to subsidiary bodies of the sectoral committees. For example, of the six expert groups of the Committee on Sustainable Energy, four included non-member countries as participants, and in trade, non-member countries participated in the two working parties in 2015.

41. In statistics, the Conference of European Statisticians, despite its name, has included a number of countries outside the ECE region as active participants, including two non-member countries on its Bureau.<sup>23</sup> In transport, the World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations has included the active participation of more than 20 countries outside the ECE region. A representative interviewed from an active non-member country, voicing a common view, stated that participation in the Conference was an opportunity to be exposed to innovative thinking, tools and methodologies on statistics.

Table 6  
**Attendance by non-member countries in committee sessions in 2015<sup>24</sup>**

| <i>Sectoral committee</i>                                                | <i>Attendance by a non-member country?</i> | <i>Number of attendees</i> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships | Yes                                        | 17                         |
| Inland Transport Committee                                               | Yes                                        | 13 <sup>a</sup>            |
| Conference of European Statisticians                                     | Yes                                        | 9                          |
| Committee on Sustainable Energy                                          | Yes                                        | 3                          |
| Committee on Environmental Policy                                        | Yes                                        | 1                          |
| Committee on Housing and Land Management                                 | No                                         | –                          |
| Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry                             | No                                         | –                          |
| Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards                       | No                                         | –                          |

*Source:* Attendance reports of sectoral committee sessions.

<sup>a</sup> The session of the Committee held in February 2016 included attendees from 23 participating non-member countries.

<sup>23</sup> Mexico and New Zealand.

<sup>24</sup> The United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business, which also reports to the Executive Committee, includes the participation of non-member countries.

**ECE also engaged in capacity-building and technical cooperation in non-member countries**

42. The global nature of many of its legal instruments has also resulted in ECE technical cooperation and capacity-building activities outside the ECE region. In 2014, five of the eight subprogrammes reported such an activity. While they were limited, for the most part, to advisory missions or workshops, they nevertheless included a more substantial endeavour with the first environmental performance review conducted outside the ECE region, in Morocco.<sup>25</sup>

**The extent and nature of ECE global work has not been deliberate**

43. There is no formal document discussing in which areas and to what degree ECE should pursue the globalization of its work. As described above, non-member countries have used ECE standards, acceded to its conventions, participated in its committees and working groups and benefited from its technical cooperation, is a testimony to the value ascribed to ECE work by non-member countries. Accordingly, more than half of member State representatives, partners and staff interviewed (34 out of 59)<sup>26</sup> believed that ECE should actively pursue the globalization of its work. Some of the reasons offered were that in many cases the nature of ECE work was already global and that all countries, not only those in the region, could benefit from ECE products.

44. Another 20 interviewees also expressed overall support for the globalization of ECE products but cautioned that this had implications, such as expanding activities and services without having the appropriate resources or capacity to support a more global clientele. For example, staff expressed how a global reach of norms, standards and conventions had produced a rise in the number of requests from non-member countries for technical support, which ECE, for the most part, could not cover. Finally, a small number of interviewees (5 of 59) indicated that ECE should not pursue global work, as that would risk undermining its identity as a regional organization.

**F. ECE has been proactive in seeking to support its member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development but faces challenges in fully optimizing its role**

**ECE has taken concrete steps to move forward with its support to member States within the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

45. During its Commission session in April 2015, and in the run-up to the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, held in September 2015, ECE discussed the opportunity presented by the upcoming agenda and reflected on how its strengths could potentially be harnessed to support the new global goals (see E/ECE/1473 and E/ECE/1474). This culminated in the endorsement by member countries of a high-level statement succinctly identifying

<sup>25</sup> ECE technical cooperation activities 2014 annual report; observation of Committee on Environmental Policy proceedings.

<sup>26</sup> Of 87 interviewees, 59 offered an opinion on the subject.

ECE work in each of the sectoral areas that could be useful in supporting the proposed Sustainable Development Goals (E/ECE/1475).

46. As shown in table 7, in 2015, six sectoral committees, with the support of the ECE secretariat, addressed the development agenda in their discussions at their 2015 annual meetings. The ECE secretariat facilitated informative sessions for some of the committees, while for others it produced presentations and papers to elicit debate on the future engagement of their committee with the goals.

Table 7

**Initiatives and discussions on the Sustainable Development Goals in sectoral committees, 2015**

| <i>Sectoral committee</i>                                                                | <i>Initiative/discussion</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Inland Transport Committee, February 2015                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informative session on transport within the Sustainable Development Goals framework</li> <li>• Request by the Committee to monitor the inclusion of transport priorities in the Sustainable Development Goals framework</li> <li>• Informal document: "Transport for sustainable development: the case of inland transport", jointly prepared by the five regional commissions</li> </ul>                                                                                              |
| Conference of European Statisticians, June 2015                                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Session on monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals at the national level</li> <li>• Session on cooperation in monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals</li> <li>• Adoption of the declaration on the role of national statistical offices in measuring and monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals (ECE/CES/89/Add.1)</li> <li>• Future development of a road map for the development of official statistics for monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals</li> </ul> |
| Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships, September 2015 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High-level substantive segment on innovation, competitiveness and public-private partnerships and their essential role in the Sustainable Development Goals</li> <li>• Presentation from the task force of the Business Advisory Board on public-private partnerships of ways of contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                          |
| Committee on Environmental Policy, October 2015                                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation by the secretariat on the role of environmental conventions in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals</li> <li>• Information paper on environmental agreements and global goals</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

| <i>Sectoral committee</i>                                   | <i>Initiative/discussion</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Committee on Sustainable Energy                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on pathways to sustainable energy</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                      |
| Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry, November 2015 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two workshops and expert meetings on forest-related Sustainable Development Goals</li> </ul>                                                                                                            |
| Committee on Housing and Land Management, December 2015     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informative session on general aspects of the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal indicators</li> <li>• Decision to develop a system for monitoring Sustainable Development Goal 11</li> </ul> |

*Source:* OIOS review of the sectoral committee session reports.

47. After the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, ECE continued to be proactive in defining its place within the Sustainable Development Goals architecture. This included a mapping exercise, which indicated that it was involved in 16 of the 17 Goals, and the launch, together with the Regional United Nations Development Group Team for Europe and Central Asia, of a survey of member States<sup>27</sup> to seek feedback on their plans for integration of the Goals into their national strategies and reporting mechanisms. The draft ECE strategic framework for the period 2018-2019 integrated the 2030 Agenda as its overarching objective.

48. Furthermore, at the time of writing, ECE was consulting with member States on the possible creation of a regional forum for review and follow-up on the Sustainable Development Goals. Regional forums, envisaged in General Assembly resolution 67/290 in the context of creating the high-level political forum, would straddle national and global review mechanisms and include other relevant regional entities. In the 2030 Agenda follow-up and review architecture currently being discussed, the regional commissions are considered well placed for collecting and consolidating follow-up information from member States, as well as entities outside the United Nations system, including other regional public and private institutions.<sup>28</sup>

#### **ECE has the necessary expertise to support member States in specific elements of the 2030 Agenda**

49. At the end of 2015, ECE identified how best to utilize its expertise to contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The first step involved adjusting indicators and improving the statistical capacity of selected member States; the second involved supporting member countries in review and follow-up using existing tools and mechanisms; and the third involved helping member countries to translate the Goals to specific standards and legal instruments.

<sup>27</sup> Survey results are expected in March 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Report of the Secretary-General on critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level (advance copy).

50. A majority of member States, partners and staff interviewed who discussed this topic (44 of 76) also noted how ECE was well placed to assist member States with implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. Some stated that the strength of ECE would be in helping countries with the review and follow-up of the Goals, in particular by using already existing tools, such as country assessments that integrated peer review mechanisms.<sup>29</sup> Some also stressed the importance of strengthening member countries' statistical capacity and suggested that ECE help with regionalizing indicators. Still others stated that conventions and standards were useful tools to help countries to implement specific thematic areas of the 2030 Agenda.

#### **ECE faces three issues as it moves to support the 2030 Agenda**

51. To best support member States in implementing and monitoring the 2030 Agenda, ECE must address three key issues. The first entails the need to strengthen coordination among its different sectoral areas and subprogrammes, as well as the linkages between its functions, as discussed in paragraph 34 above. In interviews with partners, member States and staff, this was the most frequently cited issue that ECE needed to address in order to best support member States with the 2030 Agenda. The second issue, noted primarily by ECE staff surveyed and interviewed, was the inevitable expanded workload from ECE involvement in the Sustainable Development Goals. Even if support is provided primarily through already existing instruments, structures and tools, one third of the staff interviewed volunteered that this would burden an already overstretched staff.

52. The final issue identified by partners and staff was the need to further improve engagement with partners, particularly those outside the United Nations system, such as the private sector. ECE was generally perceived positively by partners interviewed: 22 of 29 characterized ECE and their working relationship favourably, highlighting ECE capacity to gain access to and engage with national authorities due to the links forged through intergovernmental bodies, as well as its linguistic and geographical knowledge of countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. However, despite that overall positive assessment, staff surveyed identified the private sector as the main group with which ECE needed to improve its engagement in order to support member States in attaining the Sustainable Development Goals. Similarly, in interviews, the private sector was identified as the stakeholder group with which ECE had insufficient engagement. On the Sustainable Development Goals in particular, some initial steps have been taken, such as the creation of a task force of the Business Advisory Board on public-private partnerships to explore ways to mobilize the private sector behind the Goals.

## **V. Conclusion**

53. Since its creation almost seven decades ago, ECE has provided a neutral space for policy dialogue and decision-making among its member countries and has

<sup>29</sup> The environmental performance reviews, one of the ECE country assessments, was mentioned in the synthesis report of the Secretary-General on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda (A/69/700). Other country assessments are the innovation performance reviews and the country profiles on housing and land management.

effectively conveyed technical experts and facilitated consensus on a large and varied body of normative products. ECE has also withstood changes in the geopolitical landscape, including the arrival of other pan-regional entities, such as the European Union and the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the rapid enlargement of its membership base in the 1990s, which subsequently increased its activities in the technical cooperation realm.

54. Within a constrained resource environment, ECE will need to reflect on how it can most efficiently and effectively balance its three interrelated core functions, namely policy dialogue, normative work and technical cooperation, in order to add the most value to the member countries that it supports. In doing so, it will need to address certain critical issues regarding its future direction. While ECE has been recognized for its capacity to effectively facilitate the development of legally binding regulations, norms and standards, its policy role has been less prominent, and it will need to strengthen its support for the implementation of those regulations, norms and standards to further enhance its impact. ECE will also need to reflect on how it can best balance its regional focus with the further globalization of its activities and services, including the recent global opening of some of its conventions. ECE must be strategic in leveraging its partnerships, both within and beyond the United Nations system, to complement its own capacity and expertise.

55. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development comes at a critical juncture for ECE. It is both an opportunity to undergo a process of reflection on the issues posed above, as well as an occasion to demonstrate now the work that it has produced in the past seven decades has had a bearing on sustainable development and can be further leveraged to help to implement and monitor a broad and complex global development agenda.

## VI. Recommendations

56. OIOS makes five important recommendations to ECE.

### Recommendation 1 (result C)

57. **The ECE secretariat should develop and operationalize a knowledge management strategy that addresses how institutional knowledge and expertise will be captured, stored, shared and integrated into its work programme and activities.** In particular, the strategy should address the risk of losing institutional knowledge anticipated with staff departures, as discussed in the present report, and build upon existing organizational guidelines for knowledge sharing.

*Indicator of achievement:* Knowledge management strategy with target dates for implementation of each subprogramme.

### Recommendation 2 (result C)

58. **The ECE secretariat should conduct a mapping of intersectoral and interdivisional initiatives and activities in order to identify opportunities to strengthen the linkages and collaboration between its main functions and subprogrammes.** This exercise could include an assessment of the main challenges and opportunities in enhancing the cross-cutting nature of its work.

*Indicator of achievement:* Options for strengthening intersectoral and interdivisional initiatives and activities presented and endorsed by the Executive Committee.

**Recommendation 3 (result E)**

59. **The ECE secretariat should develop a proposal, for presentation to the Executive Committee, that explores the nature of its global focus, including both possible advantages and disadvantages to extending its worldwide reach.** Given that a large proportion of ECE products are currently being used by a global audience, the proposal will facilitate discussion among member States regarding a strategic long-term vision for the regional and global role of ECE. The proposal should explore resource mobilization and partnership alternatives that will allow ECE to adequately respond to global demands in future.

*Indicator of achievement:* Proposal discussed at the Executive Committee with a clear strategic vision outlined for ECE global focus.

**Recommendation 4 (result F)**

60. **The ECE secretariat should examine how its activities under existing norms, standards, conventions and related review mechanisms and statistical work can contribute to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.** In particular, methodologies for the country assessments will need to be adjusted. The tools identified by ECE should be incorporated into its overall strategy and workplan for its work in supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

*Indicator of achievement:* Within each subprogramme, review mechanisms and methodologies adjusted in line with the ECE overall strategy and workplan for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

**Recommendation 5 (result F)**

61. **The ECE secretariat should undertake a mapping of existing partnerships and cooperation with non-State actors and develop specific proposals for expanding and strengthening such cooperation in support of the Sustainable Development Goals.** ECE has established various partnerships within its sectors of work and has been lauded as a strong partner. In seeking to support the ambitious targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, ECE will need to draw on current partnerships and forge new ones, including with more non-State actors.

*Indicator of achievement:* Current and prospective partnerships are mapped with proposals for strengthening cooperation in support of the Sustainable Development Goals presented for consideration at the Executive Committee.

(Signed) Heidi Mendoza  
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services  
11 January 2017

Annex<sup>a</sup>

### Formal comments provided by the Economic Commission for Europe

1. The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) wishes to thank the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) for giving ECE an opportunity to review and comment on the draft report of OIOS on the programme evaluation of ECE.

2. This evaluation represents an important opportunity for ECE to improve its operations. ECE appreciates the commitment of OIOS to organizational learning and performance improvement.

3. ECE also thanks OIOS for the opportunity to provide comments on the previous draft reports. ECE has studied the final draft carefully and welcomes its findings and recommendations. To implement the recommendations within a reasonable time frame, ECE has agreed on an action plan outlining actions to be taken by the end of 2016.

4. ECE concurs with the recommendations in the report and would like to share its overall perspective on them.

**Recommendation 1:** The nature of the work of ECE, supporting several intergovernmental bodies covering different thematic areas as well as a high number of related subsidiary bodies, has facilitated the development and sharing of knowledge within the region and beyond. ECE concurs with OIOS that the technical expertise generated by ECE risks being lost if no knowledge management mechanisms are created. In line with previous recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit addressed to regional commissions, ECE has already started to develop knowledge management mechanisms to capture and store technical knowledge generated by the organization over the years.

**Recommendation 2:** In the light of the intersectoral and interdisciplinary nature of the work for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the ECE secretariat has already emphasized the importance of working across thematic boundaries and has started the mapping of its interdivisional and intersectoral activities, in order to identify further opportunities to strengthen the linkages and collaboration between its main functions and subprogrammes. Moreover, as part of its 2016-2017 evaluation workplan, the ECE secretariat plans to undertake a review of ECE efforts to promote cross-sectoral collaboration and an integrated approach to sustainable development work.

**Recommendation 3:** The evaluation recognizes that a large proportion of ECE products are currently being used worldwide and that this has been the subject of discussion within ECE and beyond. ECE recognizes the need for this issue to be addressed, to explore alternatives to allow ECE to respond to demands beyond its region. It should, however, be noted that this discussion cannot be undertaken by

<sup>a</sup> In the present annex, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) presents the full text of comments from the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) on the report of OIOS on the evaluation of ECE. This practice has been instituted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 64/263, following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.

ECE alone; it needs to be further discussed with other organizations and most notably with the other regional commissions, and with the full involvement of their membership. It is ultimately not up to ECE to decide which of its products/mandates should be formally recognized as being global. This should be decided by the Economic and Social Council, as well as by treaty and convention bodies. In this context, and with the aim to foster dialogue on this issue, the ECE secretariat will map activities and results which have worldwide dissemination. On the basis of this mapping, ECE will seek the advice of the Executive Committee and/or the Commission on how to proceed further.

**Recommendation 4:** As noted in the evaluation report, on several occasions ECE has discussed the opportunities presented by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, given that its work covers many of the areas addressed by the Sustainable Development Goals. In particular, sectoral bodies have contributed and are contributing with initiatives and different activities to the development of the Sustainable Development Goals and their implementation. As a consequence, and in line with this recommendation, several subprogrammes and conventions have already started to examine how their work can be further aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. ECE will continue to pay due attention to this work.

**Recommendation 5:** As noted in the evaluation report, ECE has already established various partnerships within its sectoral work and has been lauded as a strong partner. ECE concurs with the recommendation that, to strengthen its contribution to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the ECE secretariat should map existing partnerships and cooperation with non-State actors and develop specific proposals for expanding and strengthening such cooperation.

5. ECE again emphasizes that it appreciates the analysis and recommendations in the evaluation and the opportunity that it provides to further improve the work of ECE.

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Programme questions: evaluation

**Evaluation of the Office of the United Nations Department  
of Political Affairs****Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services***Summary*

The Department of Political Affairs is the lead United Nations department responsible for maintaining peace and security by assisting Member States and other international, regional and subregional organizations to prevent and resolve potentially violent disputes and conflict. The Department was last evaluated by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) from 2006 to 2008. Since then, the Department has evolved from a largely desk-based department into a more field-focused operation, reorienting its activities to support field-based conflict prevention and resolution work.

Conflict prevention and resolution work is undertaken mainly through special political missions, which have increased in number since 2008, as well as through United Nations country teams in non-mission settings. From Headquarters, the Department supports these entities through liaison with Member States, United Nations entities and others to broadly foster an enabling environment for the field entities to succeed. At the field level, the Department's support ranges from general assistance (e.g., policy guidance and administrative assistance) to specialized expertise (e.g., electoral assistance and mediation), aimed at strengthening the capacity of the field entities to achieve their conflict prevention and resolution mandates.

The present evaluation assessed the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the substantive support of the Department of Political Affairs to field-based conflict prevention and resolution work from 2008 to 2015. It relied on a wide a range of qualitative and quantitative sources to support its analysis.



During the evaluation period, the Department of Political Affairs supported almost all of the highest-criticality conflict settings. The establishment of the Department's regional offices, along with the deployment of peace and development advisers to non-mission settings, has helped broaden its global reach. Beyond the highest-criticality settings, however, the Department's presence is less far-reaching. Although resource constraints have limited its capacity to meet all needs, its strategic planning documents do not demonstrate clear, data-driven thinking on how the Department will focus its limited resources on other settings that need assistance. Department staff, the field-based entities they support and OIOS direct observations underline that the Department's shift away from desk-based analysis has left a gap, namely, early-warning analysis, that could help the Department better foresee and act on potential threats to peace.

These gaps notwithstanding, there is evidence that the Department's support has been effective and that it has contributed positively to success in the field. Staff from entities in numerous field settings point to such examples. At the same time, they note areas of lesser effectiveness, namely, the Department's inability to address system-wide administrative challenges, coordination and intervention with other actors on behalf of the field and long-term strategic guidance for the field. Its attention to gender and human rights has progressed, but both Headquarters and field leadership remain gender-imbalanced, and neither gender nor human rights is a universal field priority.

While the Department has responded to the support needs of a growing number of field operations, its human and financial resources have not kept pace with demand. Wider United Nations administrative procedures have also limited its efficiency. In addition, the Department is weakly positioned to monitor overall mission accountability for results, the adherence of missions to United Nations principles and their eventual exit. A lack of attention to harnessing knowledge with respect to performance has further prevented the Department from enhancing accountability and from learning from its successes and shortcomings.

OIOS makes four important recommendations, all of which the Department of Political Affairs has accepted, namely, that it will:

- Institutionalize its role in strengthening field-level accountability, in consultation with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General
- Fill key analytical gaps, i.e., in overall contextual analysis for early warning and early action and in evaluation
- Strengthen Headquarters and field-level planning processes
- Undertake measures to adequately resource core functional gaps.

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## I. Introduction and objective

1. The Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) identified the Department for Political Affairs for evaluation on the basis of a risk assessment that the Inspection and Evaluation Division undertook to identify Secretariat programme evaluation priorities. The Committee for Programme and Coordination selected the programme evaluation of the Department for consideration at its fifty-seventh session to be held in June 2017.<sup>1</sup> The General Assembly endorsed the selection in its resolution 70/8.

2. The general frame of reference for OIOS is set out in General Assembly resolutions 48/218 B, 54/244 and 59/272, as well as in the Secretary-General's bulletin on the establishment of the Office (ST/SGB/273), which authorizes OIOS to initiate, carry out and report on any action that it considers necessary to fulfil its responsibilities. OIOS evaluation is provided for in the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation.<sup>2</sup>

3. The overall evaluation objective was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the Department's substantive support for field-based conflict prevention and resolution work from 2008 to 2015. The evaluation topic emerged from a programme-level risk assessment described in the evaluation inception paper produced at the outset of the evaluation.<sup>3</sup> The evaluation was conducted in conformity with norms and standards for evaluation in the United Nations system.<sup>4</sup>

4. Comments from management of the Department of Political Affairs were sought on the draft report and taken into account in the final report. The Department's response is included in the annex.

## II. Background

### History and mandate of the Department of Political Affairs

5. The Department of Political Affairs is the lead United Nations department responsible for maintaining peace and security by assisting Member States and other international, regional and subregional organizations in preventing and resolving potentially violent disputes and conflict. Established in 1992, the Department receives its programme direction through General Assembly resolutions and Security Council mandates.

6. The role of the Department spans the following areas:<sup>5</sup>

(a) Monitoring and assessing global political developments, with the aim of detecting potential crises before they escalate;

<sup>1</sup> See A/70/16.

<sup>2</sup> See ST/SGB/2016/6, Regulation 7.1.

<sup>3</sup> IED-15-006.

<sup>4</sup> See UNEG/FN/Standards (2005).

<sup>5</sup> See A/67/6.

(b) Leading operational responses to crises, including deployment of mediation experts and provision of political and policy guidance and strategic direction to special political missions;

(c) Providing strategic advice to the Secretary-General and his envoys on conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding issues;

(d) Providing election-related assistance at the request of Member States and coordinating system-wide responses on electoral matters;

(e) Providing substantive support and secretariat services to the Security Council, the General Assembly and their subsidiary bodies and other intergovernmental bodies.

7. The Inspection and Evaluation Division last evaluated the Department from 2006 to 2008. Since then, the Department has evolved from a largely desk-based, Headquarters-focused organization into a more field-focused operation.

#### **Field-based conflict prevention and resolution work**

8. While the number and intensity of armed conflicts began declining in the 1990s, this trend has reversed in recent years. Civil wars, as well as attacks by Governments and armed groups against civilians, have risen for the first time in a decade, and many of today's armed conflicts are more intractable and less conducive to political resolution.<sup>6</sup> Efforts to address these conflicts have focused on two types of field missions: peacekeeping operations and special political missions. According to the budget for the biennium 2014-2015, there were 16 peacekeeping operations and 34 special political missions.<sup>7</sup>

9. Special political missions are broadly defined as United Nations civilian missions deployed for a limited period to support Member States through good offices, conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding.<sup>8</sup> Special political missions are established by the General Assembly or the Security Council, or at the personal initiative of the Secretary-General to help prevent and resolve conflict or to build lasting peace in nations emerging from civil wars.<sup>9</sup> Special political missions are a primary tool for the United Nations to engage in conflict prevention and resolution, providing a platform for political analysis and diplomacy.

10. The Department categorizes its special political missions in three thematic clusters:

- Cluster I: special/personal envoys and special advisers of the Secretary-General
- Cluster II: sanctions monitoring teams, groups and panels
- Cluster III: political offices, peacebuilding support offices and integrated offices

<sup>6</sup> *Human Security Report 2013*, available from <http://hsrgroup.org/human-security-reports/2013/overview.aspx>.

<sup>7</sup> A/69/363/Add.8.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> See A/69/363 and ST/SGB/2009/13.

11. As figure 1 shows, the total number of special political missions led by the Department of Political Affairs increased from 21 in the biennium 2008-2009 to 34 in 2014-2015, with most of this growth occurring in clusters I and II.

Figure 1

**Number of special political missions led by the Department from 2008 to 2015, by cluster**

|                                                                                      | 2008-2009 | 2010-2011 | 2012-2013      | 2014-2015       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------------|-----------------|
| Cluster I: special/personal envoys and special advisers of the Secretary-General     | 6         | 5         | 6              | 11 <sup>a</sup> |
| Cluster II: sanctions monitoring teams, groups and panels                            | 6         | 8         | 9 <sup>b</sup> | 12 <sup>c</sup> |
| Cluster III: political offices, peacebuilding support offices and integrated offices | 9         | 12        | 12             | 11              |
| <b>Total</b>                                                                         | <b>21</b> | <b>25</b> | <b>27</b>      | <b>34</b>       |

Source: A/64/349, A/66/354, A/68/327, A/69/363, A/65/328/Add.7 and A/69/363/Add.8.

<sup>a</sup> Lead of one mission is shared with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

<sup>b</sup> See A/65/328/Add.7.

<sup>c</sup> See A/69/363/Add.8.

12. The present evaluation focused primarily on clusters I and III, as these constitute the main field-based conduits of conflict prevention and resolution work; cluster II entities are ad hoc panels of external experts who undertake specific information-gathering missions on behalf of the Security Council with support from the Department.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, in addition to these three clusters, the Department of provides support to a fourth, more diverse, category of countries in non-special political mission settings (e.g., peacekeeping operations, country teams and others) through the presence of peace and development advisers (see paras. 19-24 and 31-35 below).

13. Figure II summarizes the wide range of support that the Department provides. Inferred during the data collection by the Inspection and Evaluation Division, it represents a contribution to the understanding of the Department's support by classifying the Department's work into categories that were less widely known before the evaluation. The Department's support, which spans all of the broad programmatic areas highlighted in paragraph 6, is aimed at facilitating the outcomes assessed in this evaluation. These outcomes are at two levels. At the field level, the Department seeks to build or complement the capacity of field-level stakeholders, whether at an overarching political level or in specific technical areas, to achieve the various aspects of their mandates. At the Headquarters level, the Department aims to create a broad enabling environment to help facilitate the work of the field, e.g., through liaison with Member States, other entities throughout the United Nations system and others, to serve as a conduit for information, advocacy, support and coordination.<sup>11</sup> The Department of Political Affairs is comprised of six regional

<sup>10</sup> The Inspection and Evaluation Division included cluster II entities, but with less emphasis.

<sup>11</sup> The Inspection and Evaluation Division articulated these outcome levels in a programme impact pathway included in its inception paper.

divisions (Africa I, Africa II, Americas, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Middle East and West Asia), which, in addition to supporting the cluster I and III countries (as well as non-mission countries), liaise with the other Department divisions which provide support, e.g., the Electoral Assistance Division, the Policy and Mediation Division and the Office of the Under-Secretary-General. Support to cluster II is provided largely by the Security Council Affairs Division.

Figure II

**Types of substantive support provided by the Department of Political Affairs to field-based conflict prevention and resolution work, 2008-2015**



Source: The Inspection and Evaluation Division interviews and surveys.

### Financial resources

14. The Department of Political Affairs and the special political missions it supports are found under the political affairs budget (part II, sect. 3) of the United Nations regular budget. The 2015 political affairs budget constituted roughly 20.0 per cent of the total regular budget financial resources of the United Nations.<sup>12</sup>

15. As figure III indicates, special political missions budgets consistently account for the vast majority of regular budget resources for political affairs. The numeric

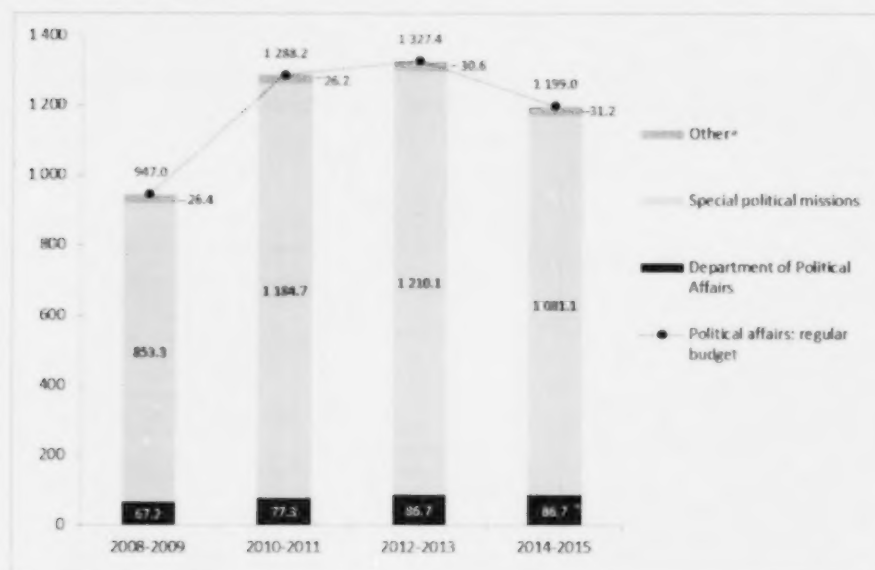
<sup>12</sup> See A/68/6 (Sect. 3).

growth of special political missions is accompanied by even greater budgetary increases.

Figure III

**Regular budget financial resources, political affairs, 2008-2015**

(Millions of United States dollars)

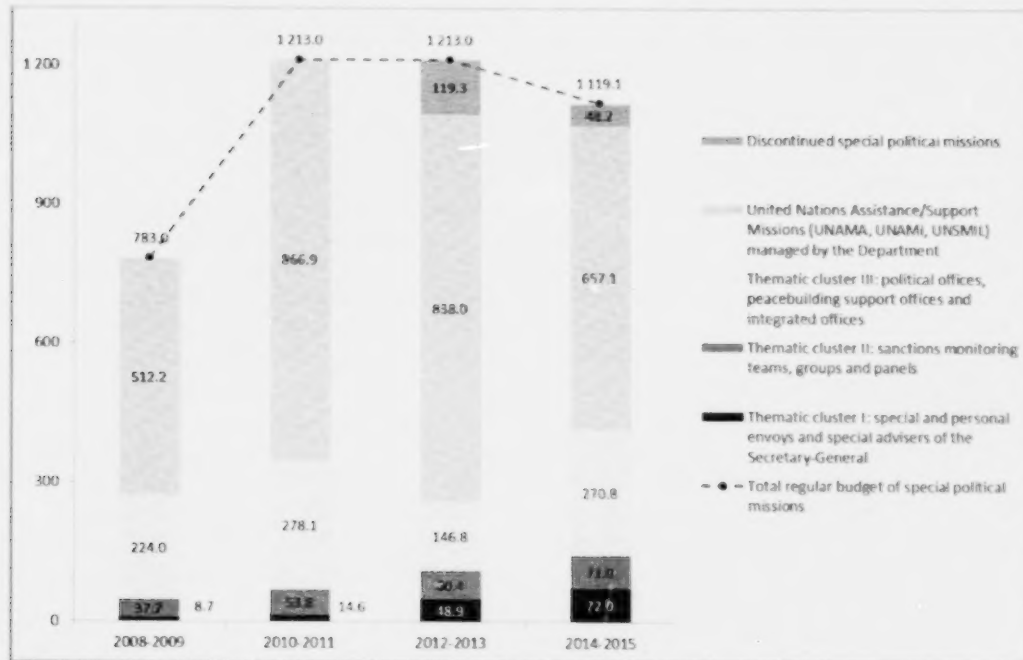


Source: Compilation of data from A/68/6 (Sect. 3), A/66/6 (Sect. 3) and A/64/6 (Sect. 3).

\* "Other" category contains Register of Damage, Peacebuilding Support Office and Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

16. Figure IV indicates how these resources are apportioned among the clusters over this same period. Three large cluster III missions (the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL)) received the largest proportion of the overall special political mission budget.

Figure IV  
**Special political mission regular budget resources, by cluster, 2008-2015**  
 (Millions of United States dollars)



Source: Compilation of data from A/69/363, A/68/327, A/67/346, A/66/354, A/65/328, A/64/349 and A/63/346.

Note: The slight discrepancies between special political mission resources cited in figures III and IV are due to the different data sources used.

<sup>a</sup> 2015 requirements for UNSMIL/UNAMA reflect six months of interim funding, pending preparation of 12-month budgets. See A/68/327 and A/66/354.

<sup>b</sup> Slight decrease in special political mission budgets in 2014-2015 is due to the fact that UNAMA and UNSMIL presented only partial budgets for 2015.

### III. Methodology

17. The evaluation relied on a mixed-method approach, which featured the triangulation of the following data sources:

(a) **Case study missions, involving interviews, focus groups, direct observations and desk reviews:** nine direct observations and five cross-mission desk reviews, as well as 110 interviews and focus groups with mission staff, United Nations country teams members, Governments and other stakeholders, in the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sahel (OSES), UNAMA, the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS), the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) and UNSMIL;<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The Inspection and Evaluation Division selected case studies on the basis of mission size and duration, cluster representation and geographical spread.

(b) **Desk-based case studies:** the same desk reviews indicated above, with UNAMI, the Office of the Special Envoy for Yemen and the Office of the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General for Myanmar;

(c) **Headquarters-level interviews and focus group discussions:** 46 interviews with Department staff, 13 United Nations partners and external think tanks;

(d) **Surveys:** web-based surveys of a non-random sample of 59 Professional-level Headquarters staff of the Department,<sup>14</sup> 85 case study mission staff,<sup>15</sup> 14 peace and development advisers<sup>16</sup> and 25 cluster II experts;<sup>17</sup>

(e) **Structured document reviews:** analyses of selected samples (or universes) of 29 planning and reporting documents; 51 evaluations, after-action reviews and other learning reports; 9 audit reports; 4 strategic assessment mission and technical assessment mission reports; 8 end-of-assignment reports by Special Representatives of the Secretary-General; and 23 Special Representatives of the Secretary-General compacts; as well as a review of the Department and mission programme documents.

18. The evaluation encountered three main methodological limitations: the inherent difficulty of measuring conflict prevention and resolution, the scarcity of results data generated by the Department and the low rate of response to the Department staff survey. The Inspection and Evaluation Division addressed the first two limitations by chronologically tracing the Department's support and field-level results, while taking into account external constraints, through desk review as well as perceptual evidence. It addressed the third limitation by undertaking non-respondent analysis, which revealed that the demographic profile of survey respondents closely mirrored that of Department staff more generally, thus indicating an acceptable level of representativeness to support the use of the survey in the evaluation.

## IV. Evaluation results

### A. There is evidence that the Department's substantive support to date has been effective, and despite significant external constraints this support is reported as contributing to field success in noteworthy ways

#### Evidence of the effectiveness of support

19. While the lack of data generated by the Department challenged the evaluation,<sup>18</sup> there is indicative evidence of the effectiveness of the Department's substantive support for field-based conflict prevention and resolution. As figure V indicates, supported field-based entities, especially peace and development advisers,

<sup>14</sup> All P2-D2 staff, 22.9 per cent response rate.

<sup>15</sup> 41.7 per cent response rate.

<sup>16</sup> 53.8 per cent response rate.

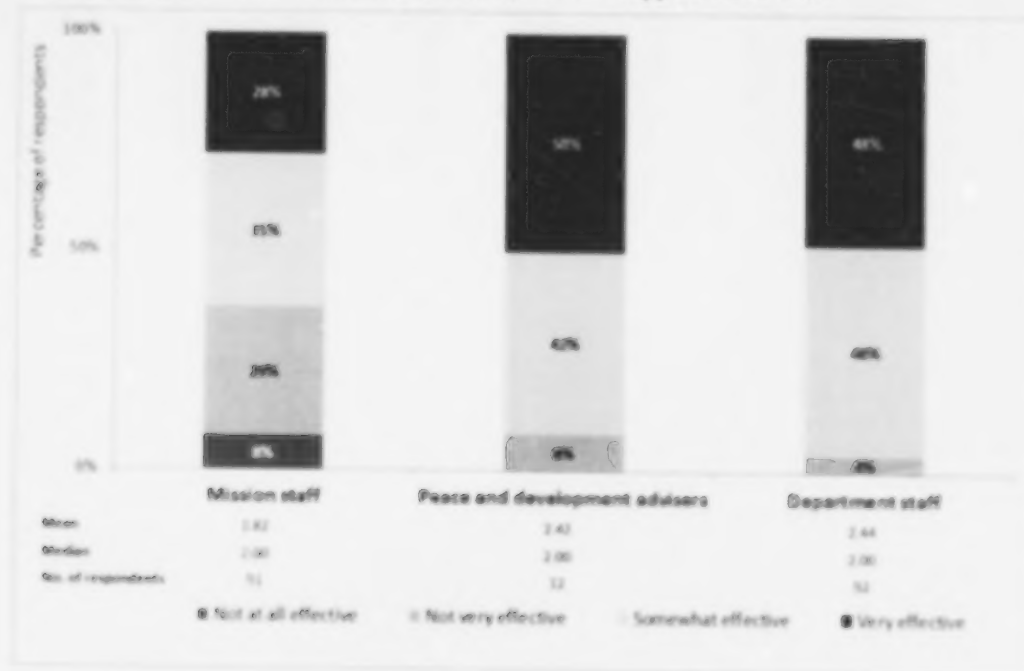
<sup>17</sup> 39.7 per cent response rate.

<sup>18</sup> See para. 18 above and paras. 44-50 below.

rate the support of the Department as relatively highly. Field leaders corroborated this positive feedback: in interviews, six of nine Special Representatives of the Secretary-General of case study missions commented positively on the Department's support, as they did in 13 of the 19 compacts reviewed. Moreover, of the 29 evaluations, after-action reviews and lessons-learned reports addressing effectiveness, 20 assessed the Department of Political Affairs positively.

Figure V

Overall perceptions of the effectiveness of Department support, 2008-2015



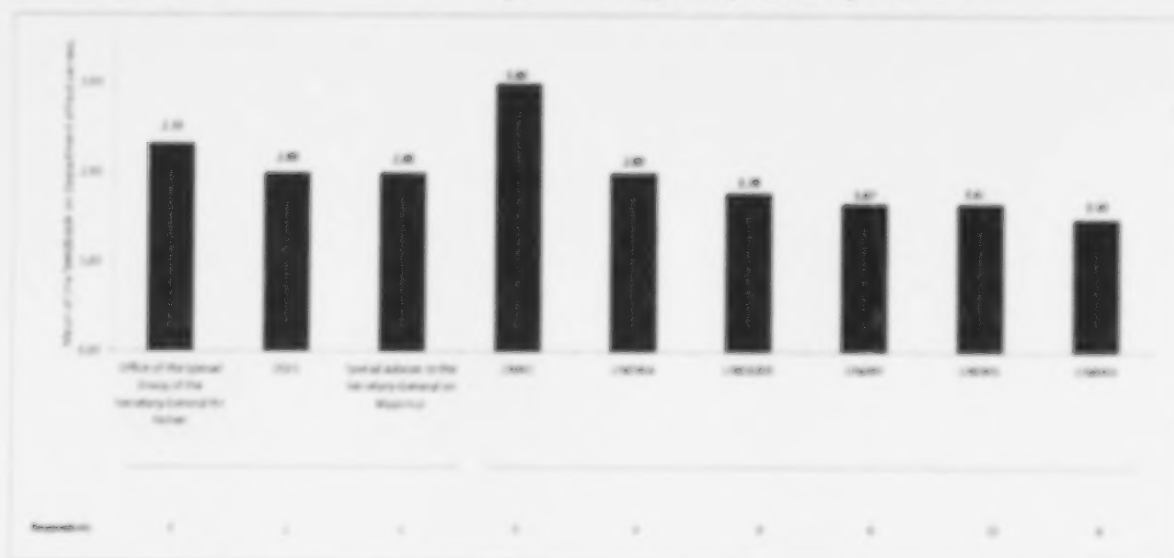
Source: Inspection and Evaluation Division survey.

Note: Definition of "effectiveness" provided by the Division: "the extent to which the Department of Political Affairs has provided high-quality support to the field, e.g., through improved capacity, the integration of specific technical expertise that they did not previously have, sound advice leading to better-informed decisions, and so on".

20. Within this broadly positive context, there were differences in the feedback by field-based entities, across both field settings and support types. As figure VI suggests, smaller missions tend to report higher support effectiveness than larger missions. This difference could be due to the higher backstopping needs of smaller missions, such as peace and development advisers, or, to the relative complexity of the operating environment of larger missions, as underlined in the Special Representative of the Secretary-General end-of-action reports from the two largest missions, UNAMI and UNAMA, larger missions cover more mandate areas, requiring long-term support for governance capacity-building.

Figure VI

Overall perceptions of the effectiveness of Department Support, by case study mission



Source: Inspection and Evaluation Division surveys.

Note: Missions presented by cluster, in descending order of means.

Abbreviations: CNMC, Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission; OSES, Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sahel.

21. These differences between smaller and larger missions could also explain variation in feedback on specific types of support provided by the Department.<sup>24</sup> Irrespective of mission size, in interviews and surveys, mission staff highlight expert technical support in electoral assistance and mediation, as well as good-offices support provided by the Department's senior management (e.g., bringing political gravity to negotiations), as particularly effective. However, peace and development advisers and smaller special political missions, more than larger missions, further point to overall political guidance as a particularly effective form of support. In addition, evaluations and after-action reviews of training led by the Department (e.g., on mediation, conflict analysis and strategic planning) conclude that this support was generally timely and increased the knowledge of participants. By contrast, long-term strategic guidance was rated the least effective support.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, staff in four of nine missions were critical of the Department's analytical products; only two were positive.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Correlation  $r = -0.62$ , the larger the mission, the less positive the perceptions of the effectiveness of support.

<sup>25</sup> Strategic assessment mission reports rarely recommend strategic shifts, despite long-term mission presence and changing conditions on the ground, thereby corroborating this result. Furthermore, five of nine audited missions lacked exit strategies.

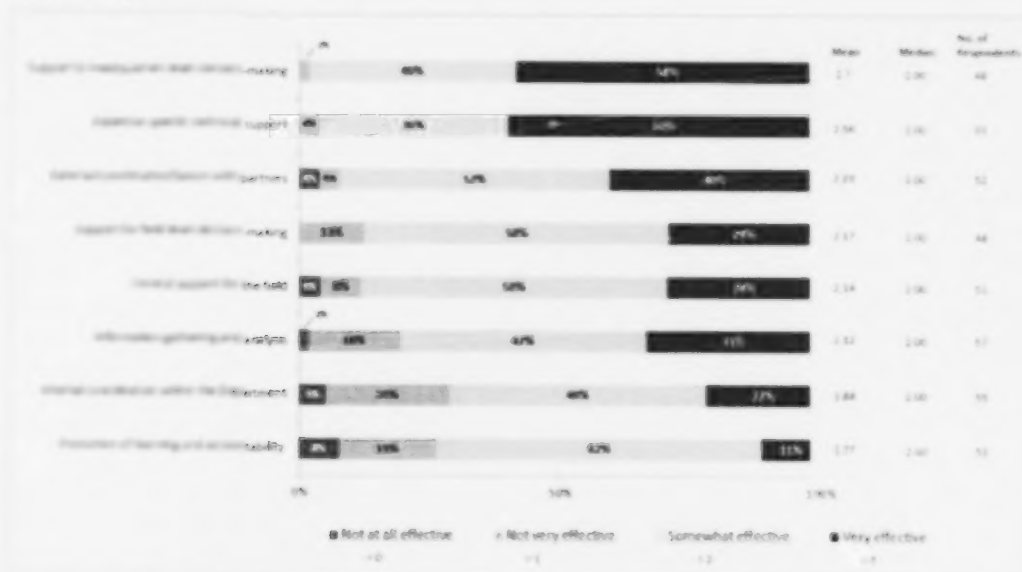
<sup>26</sup> See result D.

22. As figure VII indicates, Department staff self-assessments corroborated views in the field, although staff generally rated their own support more highly. The technical expertise of the Department received particularly high ratings, including by staff in divisions not responsible for this support. Self-assessments also corroborate the areas of relative strength and weakness highlighted in the desk review.<sup>22</sup> Another highly rated area is support for Headquarters-level decision-making, a key aspect of the Department's focus on fostering an enabling environment for the field.

23. Headquarters staff self-assessed promotion of learning and accountability, internal coordination, and information-gathering and analysis by the Department to be relatively less effective. This self-assessment generally corroborated mission case studies (see para. 21 above).

Figure VII

Headquarters staff self-assessment of the effectiveness of the Department, by support type



Source: Inspection and Evaluation Division surveys.

24. The effectiveness of the Department in supporting gender and human rights has been mixed. Surveyed mission staff, peace and development advisers and cluster II experts all perceived Department support to be fairly gender-sensitive.<sup>23</sup> In addition, 93.0 per cent of all peace processes with United Nations engagement in 2014 included regular consultations with women's organizations, compared with

<sup>22</sup> Of the 24 evaluations and other reports assessing effectiveness, 22 rated this support, with 20 rating it positively. Five also rated coordination in setting up or re-hatting a mission, all positively.

<sup>23</sup> Most respondents claimed support to be "somewhat" (45.7 per cent) or "very" (22.0 per cent) gender-sensitive.

50.0 per cent in 2011.<sup>24</sup> However, only four of nine case study missions reported receiving gender-related support from the Department; the remaining five did not provide concrete information on how gender mainstreaming was being promoted. Moreover, none reported receiving human rights-related support, all claiming that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights was their principal source of support. In one mission, senior managers raised concerns that mission leadership had neglected gender and human rights altogether, despite the fact that these were core elements of the mission's mandate, in order to focus on its preferred activity of good offices (see paras. 51-56 below). More broadly, Headquarters and mission leadership remain gender-imbalanced.<sup>25</sup>

#### **Evidence of the contribution of the Department to field-level conflict prevention and resolution results**

25. On the basis of the limited evidence available, it is plausible that support from the Department has contributed to field-level conflict prevention and resolution. Supported entities from Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Iraq, Myanmar, Nigeria and Yemen (and more anecdotally from Guyana, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)) claim that support from the Department of Political Affairs, such as expert advice on ceasefire negotiations in Yemen, election expertise advice in Afghanistan and political guidance in Maldives, had positively influenced the trajectory of conflict resolution, e.g., by reaching a relatively gender-sensitive agreement in Yemen or designing the recounting procedure for the 2014 Afghan presidential elections.

26. These reported contributions also extend to conflict prevention as well, by contributing, for example, to the peaceful 2015 Nigerian presidential transition and fostering an agreement on the Afghan presidential election results in a peaceful manner. Such examples of conflict prevention successes were few, however, owing in part to a lack of existing analysis in this area (see paras. 18 above and 44-50 below). The report of the High-level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations underscored the low level of investment in conflict prevention more broadly, even as the costs of inaction in this area are becoming ever greater to the international community.<sup>26</sup>

27. While it is difficult to gauge the impact of the effectiveness of support on mission-level success, figure VIII summarizes an analysis of the correlation between the effectiveness of the Department's support and missions' conflict prevention and resolution results. It plots consolidated ratings of the effectiveness of the Department's support against a summary measure of overall mission success, both dimensions being calculated on the basis of a triangulation of available data, taking into account the often non-linear path to conflict prevention and resolution and the many external factors influencing mission success. This analysis does not

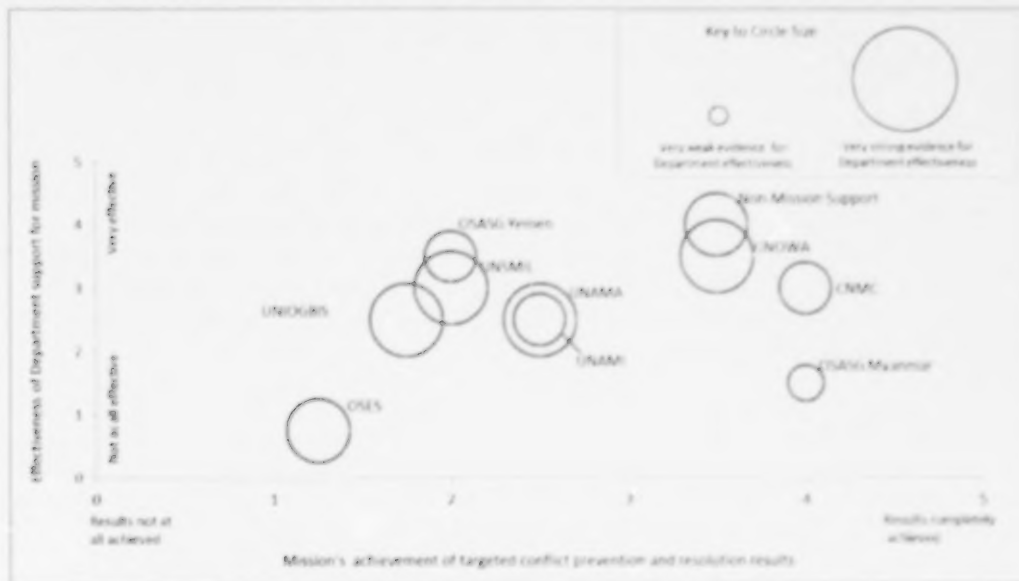
<sup>24</sup> Global study on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

<sup>25</sup> The proportion of women in P-5-D-2 positions increased from 18.0 per cent to 29.0 per cent from 2011 to 2014. The Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretaries-General for Political Affairs are all male, however. Mission leadership is even less gender-balanced: of 23 Special Representatives of the Secretary-General/Assistant Secretaries-General leading case-studied missions from 2008 to 2015, only one is female. Additionally, most missions' senior managers are male.

<sup>26</sup> See A/70/95-S/2015/446, paras. 25, 30 and 35.

imply that the mission outcomes indicated would not have happened without the Department's support, but rather that it is plausible that the Department contributed to them. The mixed picture resonated with client feedback<sup>27</sup> and Department staff self-assessments.<sup>28</sup>

Figure VIII  
Inspection and Evaluation Division summary assessment of the effectiveness of Department support and overall mission results



Source: Inspection and Evaluation Division assessment based on triangulated analysis of all available evidence. Abbreviations: CNMC, Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission; OSASG Myanmar, Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Myanmar; OSASG Yemen, Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Yemen; OSES, Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sahel.

#### Factors beyond the control of the Department have constrained mission success and the Department's support for missions

28. A number of factors beyond the control of the Department have constrained mission-level success and, by extension, the Department's effectiveness in supporting

<sup>27</sup> Although not a primary focus in this evaluation, all cluster II experts were surveyed. Overall, 73.1 per cent reported the Department's substantive support to be effective, including its facilitation of meetings and its promotion of inter-panel cooperation. Eighty-three per cent also noted that the Department had not encroached on their independence. Support areas deemed least effective were the induction training, which 52.1 per cent said could have better prepared them to understand administrative rules, and criteria on evidentiary standards, which 37.5 per cent rated less positively. Furthermore, 70.8 per cent claimed support on administrative issues was ineffectively managed, thereby hampering their work.

<sup>28</sup> Twenty-nine per cent perceived that Headquarters' contribution to mission success was significant, 54.0 per cent that it was moderate, 12.0 per cent that it was very small and 5.0 per cent that the Department had not contributed at all.

it. These factors, originally documented in the report of the High-level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations<sup>29</sup> and corroborated in the present evaluation, include Department resources relative to a growing number of missions requiring its support (see para. 11 above and paras. 29-32 below). They also include the pro forma nature of Security Council mandates, with cluster III mission mandates frequently covering up to 10 focus areas, some of which, such as the Rule of Law and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, fall outside the Department's expertise.<sup>30</sup> Further factors include access and movement restrictions, as well as the inherent unpredictability of conflict settings, and the behaviours of parties to conflict and other interested parties. Finally, staff and supported field-based entities alike assert that United Nations administrative rules and procedures, particularly those pertaining to staffing and travel, significantly limit effectiveness in the field.<sup>31</sup> Accordingly, 75.5 per cent of Department staff say external factors strongly influenced the effectiveness of support.

**B. Globally, the Department is supporting most of the highest-criticality conflict settings, and its support has generally met the expressed needs of the field; however, it lacks a broad strategy to identify what support it might provide in other settings, and how it might help enable eventual exit**

29. In the present evaluation, relevance was defined as the degree to which the Department provided its substantive support to those locations where such support was most critically needed, and whether its support met field-based needs. Defined as such, the Department's relevance was assessed to be generally high, although with some variation and potentially unmet needs.

**High coverage of highest-criticality conflict settings, but less consistent coverage elsewhere**

30. In order to gauge the Department's relevance as measured by its global reach, the Inspection and Evaluation Division categorized 163 countries and 11 non-country-specific contexts into six tiers, on three proxy measures of conflict criticality: the Global Peace Index, an index measure of media coverage of various conflicts and the number of internally displaced persons within the countries' borders. These tiers were defined as shown below.

<sup>29</sup> See A/70/16-S/2015/446, paras. 23-28.

<sup>30</sup> In its review of all four strategic assessment mission and technical assistance mission reports, in no case was a mandate significantly changed — or downsized. Furthermore, during the period under evaluation only three special political missions were closed; all others merely transitioned into another special political mission or a peacekeeping operation. This conclusion corroborates the report of the High-level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (paras. 37-39), as well as OIOS audits, five of nine of which found exit strategies lacking.

<sup>31</sup> Eighty-four per cent of Department staff claim that internal rules and procedures have limited the effectiveness of their support. In addition, in four of eight end-of-action reports, Special Representatives of the Secretary-General cite this area as a major factor jeopardizing field-level results.

|                             |        | Global Peace Index Rating | Average Media Rating | Average No. of internally displaced persons (millions) |
|-----------------------------|--------|---------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Highest criticality         | Tier 1 | Very low                  | Medium-High          | 2.14                                                   |
| High criticality            | Tier 2 | Low                       | Low-Medium           | 0.51                                                   |
| Medium criticality          | Tier 3 | Medium                    | Low-Medium           | 0.10                                                   |
| Low criticality             | Tier 4 | High                      | Low                  | 0.05                                                   |
| Lowest criticality          | Tier 5 | Very high                 | None                 | –                                                      |
| N/A — Non-country conflicts | Tier 6 | N/A                       | Low-None             | N/A                                                    |

31. The Inspection and Evaluation Division identified the Department's support presence in each of these tiers. As figure IX indicates, the Department supported almost all of the highest-criticality (i.e., tier 1) conflict settings, mostly through direct support for missions, but also through indirect ad hoc support or through peace and development advisers. Beyond this top tier, its presence was less consistent: there were 8 tier 2 countries and 22 tier 3 countries which, although high-criticality, did not receive support from the Department. Conversely, eight countries in lower-criticality tier 4 received support. This mixed picture of relevance was corroborated by Department staff who were surveyed.<sup>32</sup>

Figure IX

## The Department's support presence in five conflict-setting tiers, 2008-2015



Source: Inspection and Evaluation Division analysis of data compiled from: Global Peace Index 2015 ([www.visionofhumanity.org](http://www.visionofhumanity.org)), news aggregator for armed conflict worldwide ([www.conflictmap.org/conflicts](http://www.conflictmap.org/conflicts)), internal displacement data ([www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org)).

<sup>32</sup> Mean=3.41 (where 1=disagree strongly and 4=agree strongly) in response to a statement related to the Department's support being provided in those countries globally where it is most needed.

32. Notwithstanding these gaps, the Department is supporting more countries than it was in 2008 (see figure 1). Three main initiatives during the period under evaluation enabled it to do so. First, it expanded its regional presence through a regional special political mission in Central Africa and six liaison offices in areas where the Department had no special political mission presence. Second, it has actively strengthened its conflict prevention and resolution partnerships, most prominently through the United Nations Development Programme-Department of Political Affairs Joint Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention<sup>33</sup> as a vehicle for responding to the needs of non-mission settings.<sup>34</sup> The Department deployed 36 peace and development advisers in 2015, representing an increase of 25.0 per cent compared with the two previous years; this number is expected to grow to 40 by 2016.<sup>35</sup> While noting the programme's constraints,<sup>36</sup> both the report of the High-level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations and the advisory group of experts on the 2015 Review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture commend the Joint Programme as an example of effective inter-agency collaboration on conflict prevention and resolution.<sup>37</sup> Third, the Department created new internal support capabilities to support conflict prevention and resolution tasks, including the Mediation Support Unit, Policy and Mediation Division and a dedicated (although small) gender office and focal-point system. Moreover, in 2008 the Department established a standby team of mediators funded with extrabudgetary resources, which is a group of full-time mediation experts in specific technical areas (e.g., constitution-making, gender, natural resources and power-sharing) for rapid as-needed deployment. Finally, it has improved its ability to raise extrabudgetary resources for both staff and field-based projects through a dedicated donor and external liaison function.

**Support types viewed largely as relevant, with some variation, and potentially unmet needs**

33. As figure X conveys, the overall relevance of support from the Department is generally recognized. Some differences exist among these groups, however, with peace and development advisers rating the Department's support as more relevant than do mission staff and DPA staff themselves.

<sup>33</sup> Department and United Nations Development Programme partnership note, September 2015.

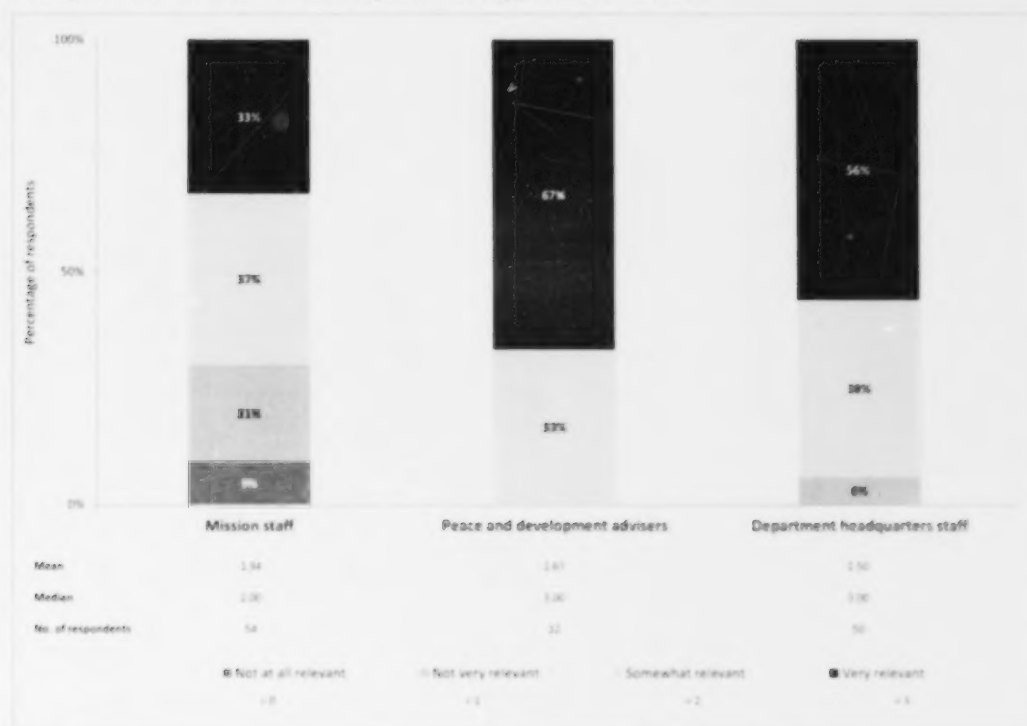
<sup>34</sup> The normative framework for conflict prevention was recently strengthened through Sustainable Development Goal 16. In addition, the Department's 2016-2019 strategic plan outlines efforts to strengthen political and technical support for United Nations country teams, and it has invested in building relationships with Permanent Representatives and regional coordinators to increase their awareness of its support.

<sup>35</sup> Department of Political Affairs multi-year appeal, 2016-2017.

<sup>36</sup> See A/70/95-S/2015/446, paras. 142-148.

<sup>37</sup> See S/2015/730.

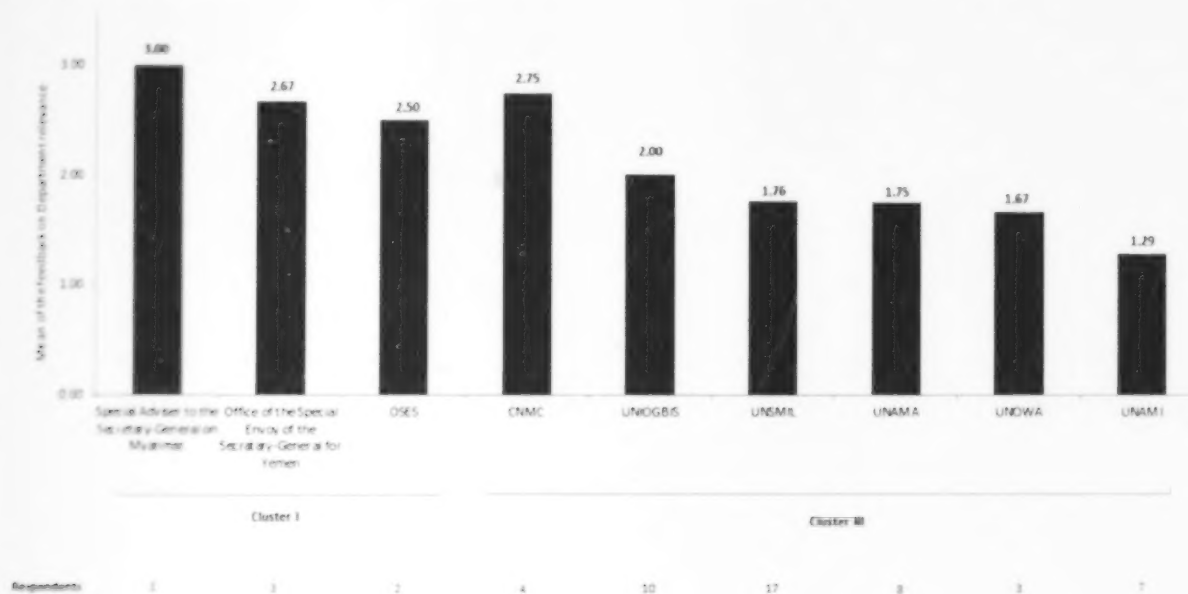
Figure X  
Perceptions of the relevance of Department support, 2008-2015



Source: Inspection and Evaluation Division surveys.

34. The more variable ratings of mission staff could be rooted in the diversity within this group. Figure XI summarizes the feedback provided by this group, broken down by individual missions selected for the case study. Overall, smaller cluster III missions, as well as small cluster I missions, rated support from the Department more positively than larger missions.

Figure XI  
Field-based entities' perceptions of the relevance of the Department's support, by case study mission



Source: Inspection and Evaluation Division survey.

Note: Missions presented by cluster, in descending order of means.

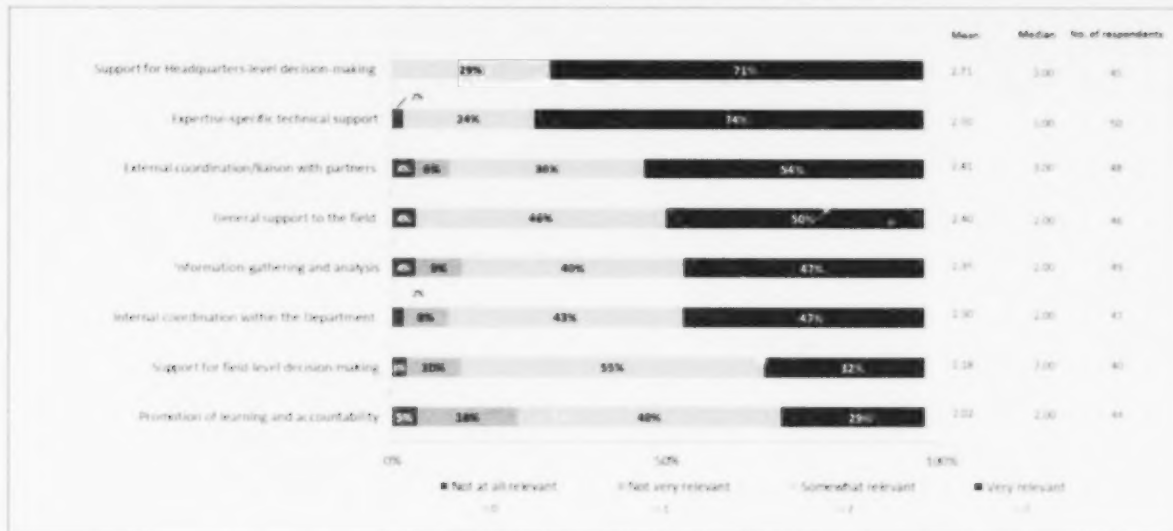
35. Perceptions of relevance also varied according to the type of support provided. For example, electoral support was extremely relevant to UNSMIL, which received support in three Libyan elections, and to UNAMA, through which the Department helped to achieve a peaceful resolution to the electoral crisis and carry out an unprecedented audit of the 2014 elections, while mediation support and expertise was particularly relevant to UNOWA, including deployment of the standby team of mediators. Peace and development advisers, meanwhile, cited the support of the Department in ensuring the flow of communication among various Headquarters partners, as well as its political guidance and expertise, as being particularly relevant. Department staff corroborated this view, as figure XII illustrates, rating specific technical support, and support for Headquarters-level decision-making, as most relevant.

36. However, there were potentially unmet needs, as awareness of Headquarters support from the Department varied at the field level. While most senior managers were aware of the Department's mediation and good-offices support, special political mission staff and several regional coordinators were not fully aware of the services that the Department provides. Awareness of administrative backstopping support was higher than awareness of substantive support, and a specific type of support cited as missing was analysis in areas where the Department had a comparative advantage, such as on regional aspects or lessons learned from similar cases. These gaps were highlighted in three of six visited special political missions,

and another two highlighted the need for more long-term strategic guidance (see para. 21 above).

Figure XII

### Headquarters staff self-assessment of the relevance of the Department, by type of support



Source: Inspection and Evaluation Division survey.

### Headquarters planning processes are not well informed by systematic analysis, hampering proactive tailoring of support for needs

37. The desk-review of Department planning documents helps to elucidate this variable feedback on the Department's relevance. At a broad departmental level, the Department has improved its strategic planning capacity since the 2006-2008 Inspection and Evaluation Division evaluation, developing its first strategic plan in 2013. Its strategic plan for the period 2016-2019 will reportedly be complemented by a results-based framework and division-level workplans. It has also improved its strategic planning and guidance within the Policy and Mediation Division. As recommended in the report of the High-level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, a small centralized analysis and planning function has been recently established within the Executive Office of the Secretary-General to bring together analytical work from Headquarters and the field, in order to inform its decisions regarding strategic assessment and planning for peace operations.

38. Despite this broad organizational progress, weaknesses remain in Headquarters and field-based planning processes. At the Headquarters level, while more recent division-level workplans reflect overarching Department priorities, with some articulating strategies for achieving those goals, the plans do not consistently or proactively identify which other missions they will support and with what types of support or how they will work together with other divisions to achieve shared

conflict prevention and resolution support objectives.<sup>38</sup> At the field level, numerous OIOS audits note planning gaps, such as a lack of linkage between workplans, mandate implementation plans and logical frameworks; insufficient linkage to United Nations country team plans; and a lack of exit strategies.<sup>39</sup> These gaps might be rooted in staff capacity constraints (see paras. 40 and 41 below), the lack of investment in knowledge products that might aid strategic planning (see paras. 44-50 below), or the recent nature of the gains noted in paragraph 37 above. Entities supported by the Department, as well as the Department's staff, corroborate these gaps.<sup>40</sup>

**C. The Department has adapted its resources to respond to the needs of an expanding field presence, but its own internal structures and procedures, coupled with cumbersome United Nations administrative processes, have limited its ability to do so in the most efficient manner**

39. As figure XIII illustrates, the resources of the Department have increased, but not at a level commensurate with that of the entities requiring its assistance. Whereas the number of special political missions has grown by 62.0 per cent (and the smaller and potentially more support-dependent cluster I missions by 83.0 per cent), resources have grown by 50.0 per cent. In addition, the Department has increasingly relied on extrabudgetary resources, growing from 20.0 per cent of its total budget to almost 30.0 per cent.

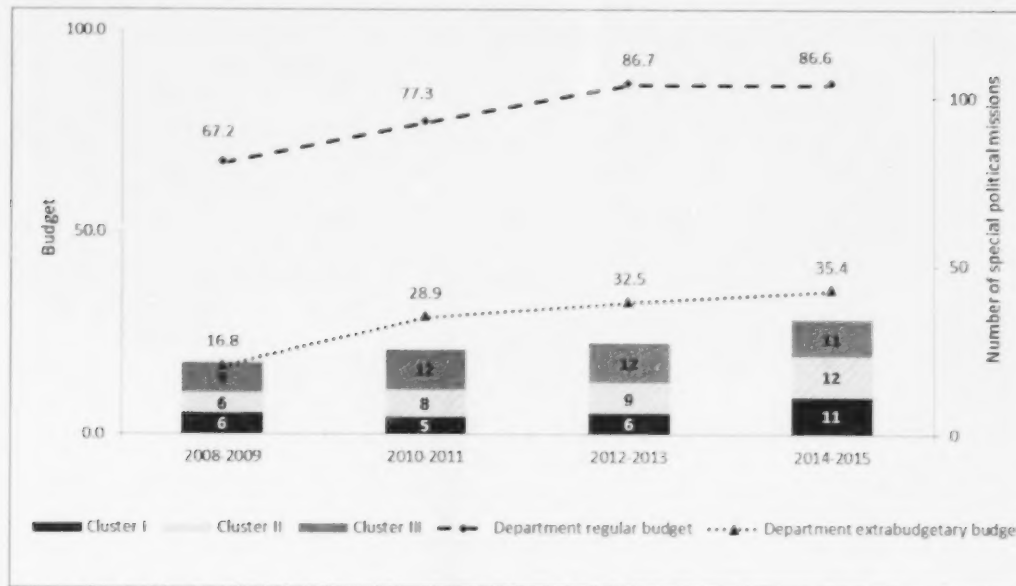
<sup>38</sup> In the Inspection and Evaluation Division review of 27 division workplans, quality and comprehensiveness varied considerably.

<sup>39</sup> Review of OIOS audits, 2008-2015.

<sup>40</sup> Peace and development adviser survey respondents and Department's Headquarters staff see areas of improvement regarding the Department's planning capacity and in its capacity for early action. This was further echoed by mission staff, who, in addition to strategic planning, mentioned the need for analytical capacity to inform strategy.

Figure XIII  
Evolution of Department resources and special political missions, by cluster

(Millions of United States dollars)

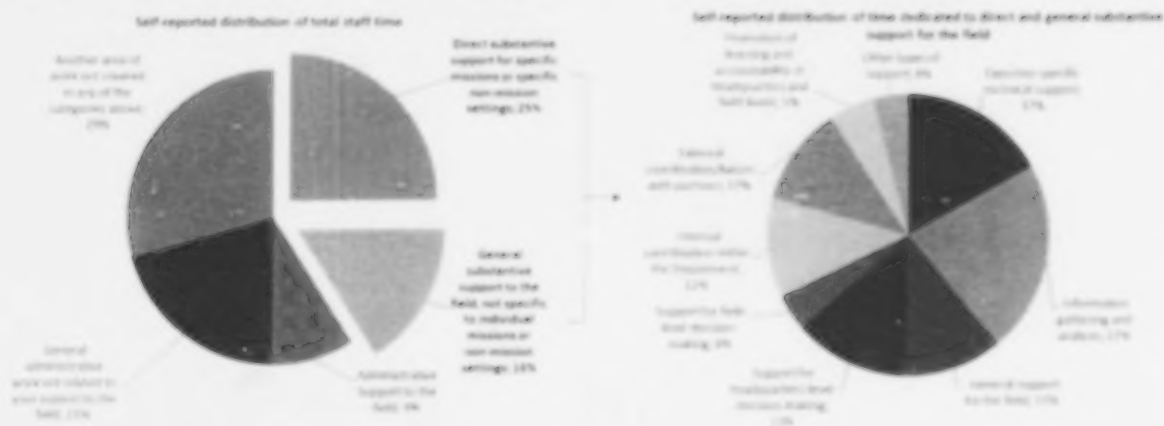


Source: A/69/416, A/68/9 (Sect. 3), A/66/6 (Sect. 3), A/64/6 (Sect. 3), A/69/349, A/66/354 and A/68/327.

40. The Department has adapted to this reality by taking steps to meet the needs of a growing field presence (see para. 32 below), with a relatively modest investment in the desk support function; for example, the overall number of the Department's desk support staff ranges from one to five per mission.

41. However, within this context, the Department has struggled to be effective and efficient. While field-based feedback on the effectiveness and relevance of the Department's support varies (see paras. 20-23 below and 33-36 above), desk officers themselves report being spread thinly, often at the expense of other important areas of support. As figure XIV illustrates, staff report spending only 41.0 per cent of their time providing substantive support to the field and 59.0 per cent on administrative work and other areas. In addition, as the pie chart on the right of the figure indicates, of this 41.0 per cent devoted to substantive support, half is spent on internal and external coordination and support for Headquarters decision-making, only 22.0 per cent on information-gathering and analysis and 17 per cent on expertise-specific technical support. These results corroborate the feedback of interviewed staff, desk officers and managers, who reported spending too much time producing talking points and briefing notes for senior management and attending to administrative matters, leaving little time for political analysis.

Figure XIV  
Department staff self-reported time allocations

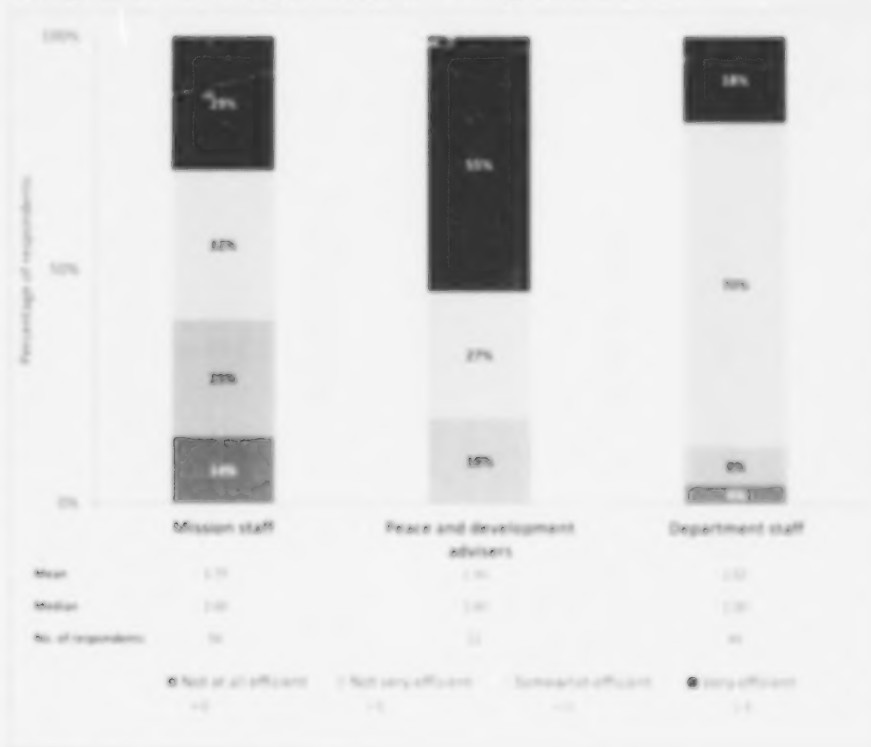


Source: Inspection and Evaluation Division survey.

42. Accordingly, as figure XV conveys, Headquarters and mission staff generally rated the Department as somewhat efficient. The smaller and more backstopping-dependent peace and development advisers, meanwhile, viewed the Department's efficiency more positively.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup> However, 68.0 per cent of staff reported that the Department has become more efficient over time.

Figure XV  
Perceptions of the efficiency of Department support, 2008-2015

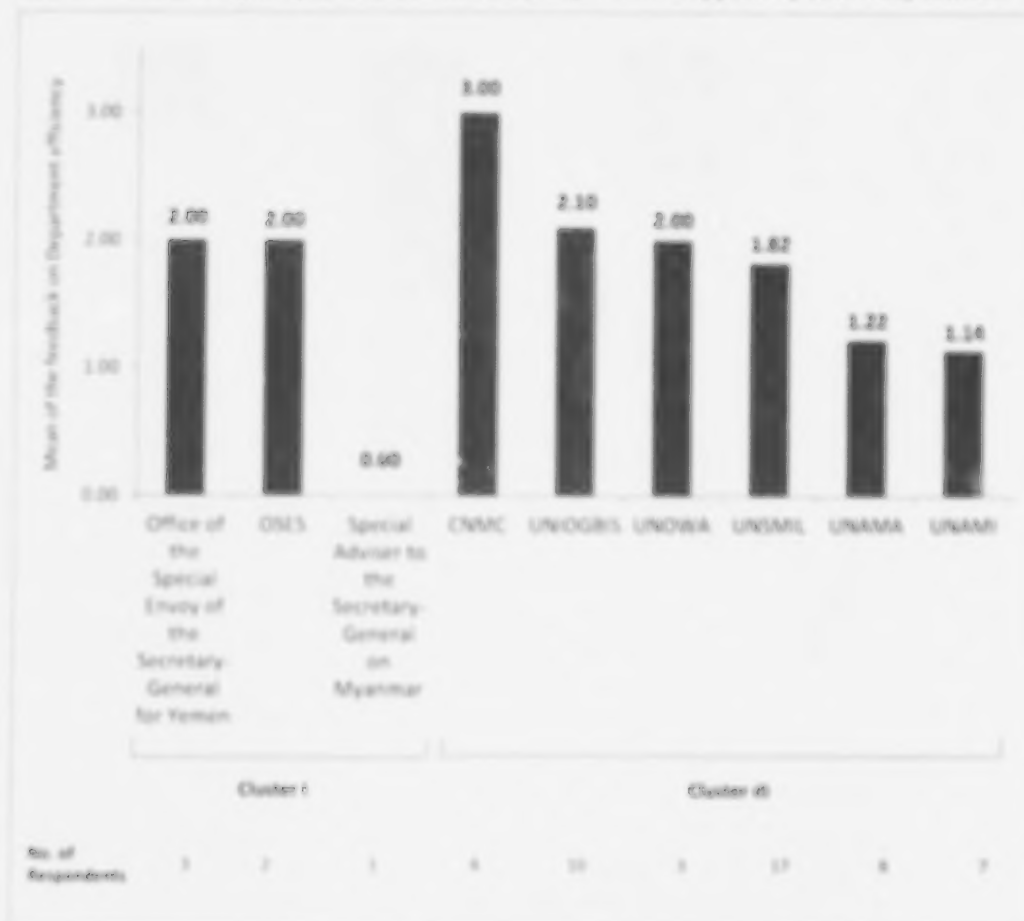


Source: Inspection and Evaluation Division surveys.

43. Figure XVI breaks down feedback from individual missions, indicating that smaller missions, such as peace and development advisers, generally found support from the Department to be more efficient than did larger and more broadly mandated missions. Mission staff feedback during case study missions helped to explain the discrepancies in specific areas. In every mission visited, large numbers of staff reported that the United Nations administrative rules and procedures, which the Department helps them to navigate, represented one of the most significant challenges, limiting their ability to deliver on their conflict prevention and resolution mandate in an efficient manner. In their end-of-assignment reports, the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General corroborated this view.<sup>27</sup>

Figure XVI

Field-based entities' perceptions of the efficiency Department support, by case study mission



Source: Inspection and Evaluation Division survey.

Note: Missions presented by cluster, in descending order of means.

Abbreviations: CNMC, Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission; OSES, Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sahel.

- D. While generating a significant volume of knowledge products, the Department has not adequately harnessed such knowledge to strengthen learning or accountability, either at Headquarters or at the field level**

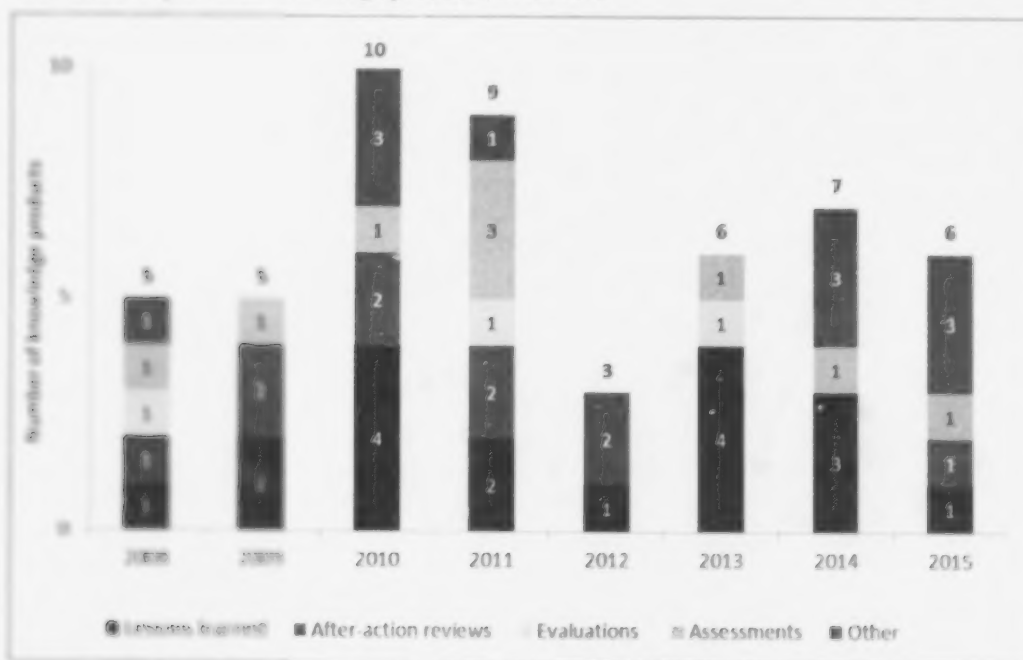
44. The Department has made strides in its use of knowledge as a source of institutional learning and improvement. For example, it established the Guidance and Learning Unit in 2010, an evaluation policy in 2012 and a learning and

evaluation framework in 2013 (revised in 2014). Accordingly, in the 2012-2013 Inspection and Evaluation Division evaluation scorecard, the Department was credited with these improvements since the 2010-2011 evaluation scorecard.

45. In the same 2012-2013 evaluation scorecard report and in the present evaluation, however, outstanding gaps remained in the Department's systems for harnessing knowledge for learning and accountability. First, the Department is not structured to produce independent evaluations of performance either at the Headquarters or at the field level. Presently, the generation of knowledge products is split between the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, which is tasked with producing evaluations (but has limited capacity to do so), and the Guidance and Learning Unit, which produces a range of non-evaluation products (e.g., after-action reviews and lessons-learned reports). There is as yet no dedicated evaluation office in the Department, which sets it apart from most other Secretariat entities.

46. As figure XVII conveys, during the period under evaluation the Department produced a total of 51 knowledge products. Most of these were learning-oriented after-action reviews and lessons-learned exercises. For the entire eight-year period, only three such products were evaluations.<sup>42</sup>

Figure XVII  
Number of Department knowledge products, 2008-2015



Source: Inspection and Evaluation Division document review.

<sup>42</sup> Evaluation of the multi-year appeal for 2011-2013 (2013), evaluation of the start-up of UNSMIL (2013) and mid-term evaluation of the Rapid Response Funding Mechanism (2012).

47. The Inspection and Evaluation Division assessed these 51 exercises as being of mixed quality, although they generated a number of concrete recommendations to improve the Department. However, the number of evaluations is low, especially given the Department's sizeable financial, programmatic and reputational risk; moreover, no evaluation covered broader outcome-level results in special political missions (see paras. 14-16 above). Furthermore, although since 2013 the Department has systematically selected cases for lessons-learned exercises, this approach does not lend itself to identifying the optimal cases from which to learn the most valuable lessons.<sup>41</sup> The generation of learning products bore little relation to the diversity of missions led by the Department: cluster I missions are heavily underrepresented,<sup>42</sup> and among the cluster III missions covered, the generation of learning products bore little relation to mission size.<sup>43</sup> No reports addressed human rights, and only the nine audit reports addressed gender.

48. The roots of this relatively low level of attention to independent, outcome-focused and risk-based evaluation are partly structural and partly resource-related. The Department's three evaluations were in fact managed by the Guidance and Learning Unit, which cited too many competing priorities and too few resources to devote itself sufficiently to evaluation. It also lacked the resources for managing evaluations, as well as the clout of the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, which left it vulnerable to internal barriers to independent evaluation.

49. In the evaluation policy and learning and evaluation framework, the Department states the intention to link its learning plan to its strategic framework and the Under-Secretary-General's compact to that of the Secretary-General. The strategic plan for the period 2016-2019 includes a results-based framework with clear indicators of success upon which an evaluation plan can be built (e.g., a 2015 baseline and 2016 and 2017 targets). However, 63.0 per cent of Department staff surveyed claimed the Department's overall investment in monitoring and evaluation is insufficient, and 43.0 per cent that the Department does not systematically reflect on its own performance. Mission staff interviewed had generally not received learning products, nor were they aware of the Policy and Practice Database repository, with the exception of mission staff who had previously worked in the Department. These staff acknowledged a greater need for lessons learned.<sup>44</sup>

50. The Inspection and Evaluation Division had first indicated these knowledge gaps in its 2006-2008 evaluation of the Department.<sup>45</sup> As the Department intends to

<sup>41</sup> Potential topics are canvassed through a participatory process, which can skew selection towards positive examples rather than the most lesson-rich examples. The Guidance and Learning Unit then systematically selects specific cases on the basis of three criteria, which can further skew the process towards positive examples. This positive skew might help explain the positive assessment of the Department in the after-action reviews and lessons-learned reports reviewed (see para. 19 above).

<sup>42</sup> Nineteen reports covered cluster III missions, eight non-mission settings and one cluster I mission.

<sup>43</sup> One product each for the largest missions, UNAMI, UNAMA and UNSOM; the rest cover smaller missions.

<sup>44</sup> For example, 50.0 per cent of peace and development adviser survey respondents did not feel that the Department sufficiently shares lessons to improve field-based work.

<sup>45</sup> See E/AC.51/2007/2/Add.4, para. 53.

revise its evaluation policy, this revision represents an opportunity to revisit these gaps.

## E. Headquarters oversight of mission accountability remains weak

51. In addition to knowledge gaps with respect to overall organizational performance, measures for enforcing the individual accountability of field leaders for results have likewise been insufficient. The Inspection and Evaluation Division first highlighted this issue in its 2006-2008 evaluation.<sup>48</sup> Since then, a range of OIOS audits have raised similar concerns.<sup>49</sup> A decade later, with limited progress documented, it remains a gap.<sup>50</sup>

52. This gap is rooted in structural factors that are largely beyond the control of the Department, but nonetheless within its remit to acknowledge and manage, wherever possible, or elevate to the appropriate level.<sup>51</sup> All but two Special Representatives of the Secretary-General and Special Envoys are leaders at the Under-Secretary-General level, and all are senior statespersons with long diplomatic careers. They report directly to the Secretary-General rather than to the head of the Department, who is likewise an Under-Secretary-General. Since 2009, Special Representatives of the Secretary-General have been required to develop compacts with the Secretary-General. This action, spearheaded by the Department, represents the single most tangible sign of progress documented to strengthen field-level accountability since the 2006-2008 Inspection and Evaluation Division evaluation.<sup>52</sup> This commitment has not been fully fulfilled, however; as figure XVIII conveys, the proportion of Under-Secretaries-General in the missions selected for case study who completed compacts consistently hovered in the area of 50.0 per cent during the period under evaluation.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., paras. 46-49, 58 and 59 (c).

<sup>49</sup> See A/64/294, OIOS audit of the Department's substantive and administrative support to special envoys, 2 September 2011, assignment No. 2011/560/01 and OIOS audit of United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone, 23 January 2012, assignment No. 2011/560/02.

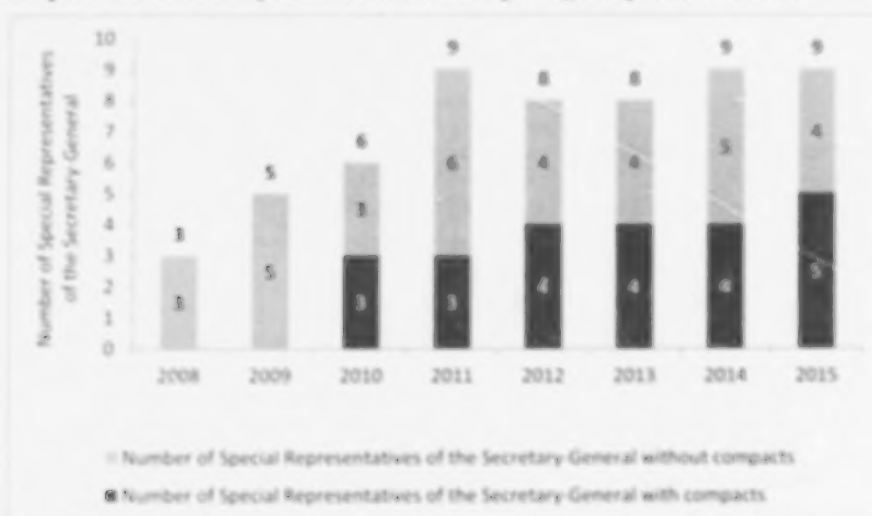
<sup>50</sup> The 2007 Inspection and Evaluation Division evaluation focused specifically on Special Envoys' offices. In the present evaluation, the Inspection and Evaluation Division pinpoints these offices as embodying higher accountability challenges, owing to the lack of compacts.

<sup>51</sup> In follow-up to the Inspection and Evaluation Division 2007 evaluation, the Department correctly noted that most action on the recommendation rested with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General.

<sup>52</sup> Establishment of these compacts resulted from the Inspection and Evaluation Division 2007 evaluation; the subsequent follow-up triennial review (see E/AC.51/2011/3) cites the compacts as the most tangible sign of progress in strengthening mission accountability.

Figure XVIII

Proportion of case study missions leaders completing compacts, 2008-2015



Source: Inspection and Evaluation Division document review.

53. Most strikingly, none of the Special Envoys included in the analysis had completed a compact at any time, as they are not required to do so, unlike the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General.

54. Although the Executive Office of the Secretary-General is responsible primarily for overseeing field-level accountability, the Department plays a role in this area by providing feedback on the compacts of the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General. In a positive sign of Executive Office attention to field accountability, it completed end-of-cycle performance assessments in response to all compacts produced by the 21 Under-Secretaries-General during this period. Beyond the compliance level, however, these performance documents lack a strong focus on individual accountability: among the Special Representatives' 569 targeted results from 2008-2015, the vast majority (69.6 per cent) focused on output production (e.g., training sessions held) rather than outcomes achieved, this despite purported efforts by the Department to instil a stronger results orientation into the compacts. In addition, 63.1 per cent of these 569 results were rated as having been "satisfactorily" achieved by the Special Representatives, 25.4 per cent as "partially satisfactorily" and only 11.5 per cent as "not achieved", and among those in the last category in no case did the performance assessment attribute non-achievement to the Special Representative; only external factors were cited as reasons for non-achievement. Furthermore, the Department staff who provide inputs to the compacts of the Special Representatives are beneath the staff level of the Special Representatives; the more authoritative Under-Secretary-General does not serve as a conduit for the Department's collective feedback on mission performance.

55. Against this backdrop, the relationship between the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs and missions leadership uniformly appears to

be one of collegial support from the former to the latter, rather than one of heavy-handed oversight. In all case study missions, the current cohort of mission leaders described their relationship with the Office of the Under-Secretary (and the Under-Secretary-General himself) as one of mutual trust and as-needed contact. In these cases, mission leaders as well as their senior managers reported that the lack of the Department oversight served as a useful form of support in its own right: without the "heavy hand" of Headquarters, leaders could attend to the challenging political tasks at hand. However, this sentiment was invariably qualified by the rejoinder that the positive nature of this relationship rests on the personal competence and style of the Under-Secretary-General and the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General.

56. From the case study missions, there were numerous positive examples of field-level effectiveness, as well as a handful of cases that underlined the gap in institutionalized oversight. In three of the seven case study missions led by Under-Secretaries-General, for example, concerns were raised by mission staff, as well as external stakeholders, about current or previous neglect by Special Representatives of broad areas of their mandate, in order to focus on their good-offices role. In one case, this conduct reportedly occurred without a plan to entrust these other aspects of the mandate to the mission's Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General. In two cases, staff raised concerns about a previous leader's ethical conduct, but no performance assessment was located for the Special Representatives in question. The fact that the Department's staff self-report on the effectiveness of its promotion of learning and accountability, and their limited ability to dedicate time to this function, underline this gap (see para. 22 above and figure VII).

## V. Conclusion

57. Since the 2006-2008 Inspection and Evaluation Division evaluation, the Department has adapted to the significant growth of field-based conflict prevention and resolution by reorienting its activities, structures and partnerships to support this work. It is currently supporting almost all of the highest-criticality conflict settings, and there are noteworthy examples of how its support has contributed to success in the field, despite significant external constraints affecting this success. The entities it supports, particularly smaller and more backstopping-dependent missions, positively acknowledge the Department's achievements in adapting to its more field-focused role in these ways.

58. Despite these gains, the Department is still adapting to meet the support needs placed on it. Its analytical capacity, for example, which once constituted a core focus, now represents a key support gap. Although resource and structural constraints have limited the Department's ability to fully meet expectations, its constraints are also internal. The Department still lacks a dedicated evaluation function with the independence and resources to generate objective and credible knowledge on performance, nearly a decade after the Inspection and Evaluation Division pointed out this gap. Its planning processes do not systematically incorporate analysis as an input into their strategies. Most prominently, the Department remains poorly positioned to oversee field-level accountability.

## VI. Recommendations

59. The Inspection and Evaluation Division makes four important recommendations to the Department, all of which it has accepted.

### Recommendation 1 (result E)

The Department, in consultation with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, should seek to institutionalize its role in contributing to field-level accountability, by:

- Developing an accountability framework to clearly delineate roles and responsibilities of the Department (including that of the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs) in relation to those of the Executive Office and mission leadership, in contributing to field-level accountability
- Advocating the requirement that compacts be completed by Special Envoys and Special Advisers
- Making mission leadership compacts publicly available.

*Indicators:* Framework developed, implemented and monitored, leading to enhanced Department role in strengthening mission accountability; compact requirement made universal; compacts made publicly available

### Recommendation 2 (results A, D and E)

The Department of Political Affairs should fill two key analytical gaps, both linked to its learning and accountability needs as rooted in the 2016-2019 strategic plan and the Department's priorities, namely:

- Its political analysis, as a tool for early warning leading to early action and as an input into Headquarters and field-level planning processes
- Its evaluation function and other sources of evaluative knowledge (e.g., lesson-learning, after-action reviews), by ensuring that the planned revision of the Department's evaluation policy adequately addresses independence and resource and risk-based planning gaps.

*Indicators:* The actions above are undertaken, and their implementation monitored, resulting in analytical products that are tailored to the knowledge needs of the Department, are of high quality and credible to key stakeholders and are used to inform decision-making

### Recommendation 3 (results A and C)

The Department should strengthen Headquarters and field-level planning processes by ensuring that:

- All Headquarters divisions incorporate knowledge generated from data-driven analysis (see recommendation 2) and articulate a well-evidenced rationale for where they will invest their finite resources and through which specific types of support, both individually and in collaboration with other divisions
- All mission plans and associated documents (budgets and organization charts) are quality-assured for consistently high clarity on how the expectations of the

Security Council and the Executive Office of the Secretary-General will be achieved (e.g., structural alignment with mandate, outcome-focused indicators of achievement and exit strategy), in line with recommendation 1.

*Indicators:* The Department of Political Affairs undertakes quality assurance of all mission plans, and necessary changes are made to achieve full alignment with Security Council and Executive Office expectations.

**Recommendation 4 (results B and C)**

The Department, in consultation with the Security Council, other intergovernmental bodies and member State groupings, individual donors, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the Controller and partners, should undertake measures to adequately resource core functional gaps, whether through internal resource reallocations, strengthened resource mobilization to generate additional and more predictable resources, or some combination of both, in the following areas:

- Conflict prevention, including analysis to help better enable early warning and action
- Evaluation
- Knowledge management
- Strategic planning
- Resource mobilization itself.

*Indicators:* Consultations undertaken with stakeholders indicated, leading to adequate and more predictable resourcing of the areas indicated.

## **Annex**

### **Formal comments provided by the Department**

The Inspection and Evaluation Division presents below the full text of comments received from the Department of Political Affairs on the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the evaluation of the Department. This practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution 64/263, following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.

### **Comments of the Department on the results of the evaluation of the Office of the Department of Political Affairs**

1. I refer to your memo dated 9 May 2016 and wish to express my appreciation to Robert McCouch and his team for useful exchanges and the opportunity we have had to provide informal comments and feedback on the draft report on the evaluation of the Department of Political Affairs.
2. I am grateful to note that most of our comments and the factual clarifications we provided were incorporated. At this stage, we do not have any additional comments.
3. We believe that the report, taking into account its angle and scope, reflects the measures that the Department has taken since the previous evaluation to improve its effectiveness and efficiency in the areas of conflict prevention and mediation. We take note of the recommendations proposed in the report to further strengthen our capacities and working methods.
4. I am pleased to attach our proposed action plan for the implementation of the recommendations. We take note that some of the recommendations require the support of other actors, including the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, Member States and the General Assembly, and we will endeavour to work with all these entities to ensure their implementation.
5. Allow me once again to thank your team that has worked on this evaluation for the availability, engagement and constructive spirit shown throughout this exercise.